

Politics and Aphorisms: A Contextual Study of the Politics of George  
Savile, First Marquis of Halifax through his Literary Short Pieces

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## **Abstract**

This study examines the politics of George Savile, first Marquis of Halifax between the Exclusion Crisis of 1679-1681 and the Glorious Revolution of 1688-1689. It examines Halifax's politics in the context of a set of primary sources that have hitherto not been given enough attention in Halifax studies. This set of sources is his aphorisms. Halifax is well-known as a political writer and an aphorist, but not much focus has been given to his short pieces and their connection to his politics in practice. This study fills the gap by looking at Halifax's politics in the context of the thoughts and ideas imbedded in his aphorisms. Halifax's aphorisms reveal a deep acceptance of the imperfections of the human condition. He believed that the human mind was limited in what it can know with certainty; and human nature, rather than reason, dominated the human character. Such imperfections were fully and explicitly accepted by Halifax. It was an integral part of his worldview as revealed by his aphorisms. By reading Halifax's politics and political career in the context of these aphorisms, a specific interpretation emerges. This interpretation is that the spirit of his politics was very much in tune with his sceptical outlook of the human condition and his acceptance of its inherent imperfections.

## **A Note about Dates and Quotations**

The dates used in this study are in old style. The start of a new year, however, has been treated differently. In seventeenth-century England, the calendar year started on 25 March. This study has taken the year as starting on 1 January instead. England's calendar at the time was also ten days behind from the calendar used on the European continent. This study has cited the dates of foreign correspondence and dispatches according to the dates provided by their authors. In cases where both the English and foreign calendar dates are given in a correspondence, they will be cited alongside each other respectively.

This study has also kept the original spelling and punctuation of the primary material it has quoted from. Because this study makes use of edited versions of primary sources, some of the quotations will have already been modernized. Additionally, in citing Halifax's own aphorisms, the line numbers of the cited aphorism are provided after the page numbers.

## Introduction

George Savile, first Marquis of Halifax, was a Restoration politician with a complex reputation. His political conduct has been both criticised and praised by posterity. A contemporary during the entirety of the Restoration era, Halifax is chiefly remembered for the roles he played in the more tumultuous events of the period. He was politically active during the infamous Exclusion Crisis between 1679 and 1681. This was a time when fears of a Catholic threat to Protestant England reached its height and eventually pulled Charles II's Catholic brother and heir presumptive, James Duke of York, into the spotlight. Many feared that the Catholic Duke would inevitably bring about the ruin of Protestant England upon his succession. Some sought to prevent this grim future by a radical solution. The Whigs, as they were later called, became the main supporters of a project to exclude James from the royal line of succession. These Exclusionist Whigs were countered by those later known as the Tories, who upheld the monarchy's majesty and its hereditary nature. Halifax, who was in no way on friendly terms with the Duke, defended his birth right and openly opposed Exclusion in 1680. He subsequently took part in the government policies to suppress the Whigs after 1681. This did not mean, however, that he exalted the monarchy or was subservient to the Crown. After the Whigs were effectively defeated in 1683, Halifax tried to steer Charles away from what he saw as unconstitutional and unpopular policies. During James II's reign, Halifax actively opposed his attempts to revive Catholicism in England against the wishes of his Protestant subjects. The Marquis' most notable actions after the Exclusion Crisis was the role he played during the Glorious Revolution. This event saw James II deposed and William of Orange along with his wife Princess Mary crowned as the new King and Queen. During the Revolution, events compelled Halifax to ultimately side with the

Prince and have him crowned King. It was an odd twist of irony that Halifax would formally offer the English crowns to William and Mary in 1689, a mere nine years after having vigorously defended James' right to the throne in 1680.

Posterity has understood Halifax's variable politics and career in a variety of ways. Since his death in 1695 to the early-nineteenth century, those historians who have commented on the Marquis tended to interpret his politics as a manifestation of a lack of principles. On the other side of the spectrum, historians between the early-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries would see his conduct as being motivated by pragmatism and patriotism. Rather than being a manifestation of a lack of principles, his politics was reinterpreted as that of a virtuous moderate, the Trimmer, who would trim the sails between political extremes in order to keep the ship of state afloat. These revisionist interpretations were informed by a growing acceptance of Halifax as not only a seasoned politician, but also a profound intellectual thinker. Scholars during this period began to recognise the depth of his numerous writings and incorporated them in reinterpretations of his politics. Among Halifax's most famous writings was the political pamphlet, *The Character of a Trimmer*. This pamphlet has been read as his defence of political moderation in government and a vindication of his creed. As scholarly consensus gravitated towards a positive view of Halifax's politics, other scholars from the early-twentieth century onwards began giving greater focus to his writings. Through more nuanced readings of Halifax's works, scholars went on to interpret his politics through more intellectual themes such as Toryism, Machiavellian concepts, and dichotomies between idealism and realism. The



interpretation of Halifax's politics is an area of scholarship that has been developing over the centuries since his death.

This study aims to contribute to this developing area by offering another interpretation of Halifax's politics and career. It will do so by using a set of primary sources that has not been given enough focus. This set of sources is his aphorisms. Halifax wrote numerous prose works, but he was also an avid practitioner of the aphoristic genre. This was apparent as early as 1750, when a sizeable compilation of his aphorisms was published. The topics of these aphorisms vary greatly, from politics and the art of government to thoughts about human nature. Modern scholars have recognised Halifax as an aphorist, but few studies on him have focused on the aphorisms. Specifically, no attempt has been made to interpret Halifax's political conduct through the character insights provided by his short pieces. This study aims to fill this historiographical gap by undertaking a reading of Halifax's politics in the context of his aphorisms.

Developments within Halifax scholarship have also given compelling reasons to revisit his political career and give greater attention to his aphorisms. Much of the scholarly output about Halifax was dated before Mark N. Brown's 1989 *The Works of George Savile, Marquis of Halifax*. Brown's new compilation of Halifax's works opened new ground for studies on this Restoration figure. Before Brown's compilation, scholarship on Halifax operated on a fixed canon of his works that remain practically unchanged for two centuries. Brown's compilation added a significant number of previously unknown and unpublished works by Halifax. Among these unpublished works are numerous collections of his

aphorisms. These unpublished collections significantly bolstered the number of Halifax's extant aphorisms. It indicated that the 1750 compilation was but a small selection of his actual output in the aphoristic genre. The themes of these new aphorisms follow that of the 1750 compilation, being a mixture of political and miscellaneous thoughts. However, these new aphorisms have given a much fuller picture of Halifax's worldview and character. Taking the aphorisms together, they can be read as a source that lays out the inner character of this Restoration politician.

This study offers a specific interpretation of Halifax by reading his politics in the context of his aphorisms. The topics of the aphorisms varied greatly, but there was an underlying theme that pervaded through many of them no matter the topic. This theme was his acceptance of humanity's epistemological limitations and its nature driven character. Halifax believed that there were insurmountable limitations on what the human mind can know with absolute certainty. This sceptical view extended to his ideas about the fallibility of human foresight and human notions held to be fundamental. Halifax's aphorisms also showed his belief that the human character was dominated by human nature rather than guided by reason. From this view, he believed that human beings, being influenced more by nature than reason, were liable to commit actions that were irrational or harmful to the wider community. For Halifax, such tendencies borne from human nature needed to be checked. Despite this, Halifax believed that these imperfections were an inescapable reality. In his aphorisms, he emphasised on the need to navigate through these imperfections rather than ignoring or defying them. In other words, the Marquis fully accepted the imperfections inherent in the human condition. This study will suggest that the notions

imbedded in these aphorisms were entirely consistent with his politics and conduct throughout a specific period of his career. The resulting interpretation will be that Halifax's politics, between the Exclusion Crisis and the Glorious Revolution, was consistent with his acceptance of human imperfection.

This study comprises of eight chapters. Chapter one discusses the existing scholarship surrounding Halifax studies and highlights this study's place within this historiography. Chapter two serves as an introductory narrative to Halifax's early life and early political career up until 1678. Chapters three to seven will be a narrative of Halifax's political career between 1678 to 1689 and will serve as the main body of this study. The narratives in these specific chapters will be given in conjunction with close readings of his aphorisms. Each of these chapters aim to show a consistency between Halifax's politics and specific notions conveyed in his aphorisms.

Accordingly, chapter three focuses on the Exclusion Crisis between 1679 and 1681 and discusses Halifax's rejection of Exclusion. It will be shown in this chapter that this rejection was consistent with his sceptical views of human foresight and his understanding of human nature. Chapter four deals with Halifax's subsequent participation in the government's suppression of the Whigs. This chapter will suggest that his participation was characteristic given his criticisms of extremist mentalities in his aphorisms, like the one he thought the Whigs harboured at the time. Chapter five will cover the period 1683 to 1685, between the effective defeat of the Whigs and Charles II's death. This chapter shows Halifax's attempts to steer Charles away from unconstitutional and unpopular conduct.

These attempts will be shown to be consistent with Halifax's awareness of the practical flaws inherent in a government's claim to absolute power. Chapter six deals with Halifax's political conduct during James II's short reign. It focuses on his strategy to frustrate James' Catholic policies. This chapter will develop from Halifax's aphoristic ideas introduced in chapter five. Specifically, it suggests that his strategy was in line with his sceptical views of government authority and that authority in fact depended on the compliance of the people. This chapter also touches on Halifax's decision to distance himself from inviting William's intervention into English affairs. As will be shown, his cautious attitude was in line with his self-conscious awareness of the detrimental effects of yielding too much to one's impulses, such as an excessive eagerness to achieve a particular goal. Chapter seven deals with Halifax's support for William of Orange's bid for the English throne during the Glorious Revolution. This chapter suggests that his actions were consistent with his aphoristic ideas about adhering to the circumstances of the moment rather than speculative constitutional and legal fundamentals.

Finally, chapter eight will gather the threads throughout chapters three to seven. It will show that the notions conveyed in the aphorisms of the preceding chapters were part of a larger view of the human condition. It stresses that the two major components of this view were Halifax's beliefs in the limitations of the human mind and the nature driven character of human beings. Halifax fully accepted such imperfections, and this acceptance was an integral part of his worldview. Insofar as Halifax's political conduct was consistent with his belief of the mind's limitations and views of human behaviour, this chapter will

retrospectively suggest that his politics throughout the studied period resonated with his larger acceptance of human imperfections. This study will conclude itself after chapter eight.

## **Chapter 1 – Historiography and Methodology**

The purpose of this chapter is threefold. It's first purpose is to chart the development of Halifax scholarship between H. C. Foxcroft's monumental work on Halifax in the early-nineteenth century and Mark N. Brown's no less impressive rediscovery of several of the Marquis' unpublished works in 1989. By undertaking this survey, this chapter will set this study in the context of the new ground opened by Brown's scholarship. The second purpose of this chapter is to address this study's contribution to current scholarship on Halifax. Specifically, it will explain how this current study of Halifax's politics using his many aphorisms as its main primary source will fill a historiographical gap and offer a unique interpretation of his politics. Finally, the third purpose of this chapter is to address some methodological issues that might be present in this study. It will address issues of interpretation relating to this study's emphasis on the aphorisms and specify reasons for its particular focus on Halifax's political career from 1679 to 1689.

### **Halifax Scholarship from H. C. Foxcroft to Mark N. Brown**

Scholarly interest in Halifax would not begin in earnest until two centuries after his death. To be sure, there were some early attempts between the intervening centuries to understand this Restoration politician.<sup>1</sup> A notable example would be Thomas B. Macaulay's brief character studies during the early- to mid-nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> William Durrant

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<sup>1</sup> A fuller discussion of these early attempts will be further examined below.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas B. Macaulay, *Macaulay's Essay on Sir William Temple*, ed. G. A. Twentyman (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1905), pp. 74-77; Thomas B. Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James II*, vol.

Cooper's introduction to the 1858 *Savile Correspondence* also contained a brief dedicated account of Halifax's career during Charles II's reign.<sup>3</sup> But significant attempts at studying the Marquis would not really begin until H. C. Foxcroft's scholarship beginning from 1896. Foxcroft in her own time noted the lack of scholarly attention to everything Halifax. In her 1896 article on Halifax's works, she lamented that "despite eulogies so suggestive, the brief, if admirable, notice prefixed by Mr. Cooper to the 'Savile Correspondence' remains the only attempt at a memoir."<sup>4</sup> Foxcroft was also surprised that Halifax's literary endeavours were not better known. As she wrote, his name "occurs in no history of English literature with which the present writer is acquainted; no collected or critical edition of his works has yet appeared."<sup>5</sup> Noting the neglected state of Halifax scholarship, Foxcroft followed her article with her two-volume *Life and Letters of Sir George Savile* two years later.<sup>6</sup> *Life and Letters* filled much of the lacuna noted by Foxcroft in two ways. It was the first scholarly and full-length biography of Halifax and its part two also served as a complete compilation of his known literary works at the time. Through *Life and Letters*, Halifax's life and his literary endeavours were brought together in one convenient work.

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1 (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1849), pp. 242-246. Macaulay's *Essay* first appeared in 1838 and his *History* began print in 1848.

<sup>3</sup> William Durrant Cooper, Introduction to *Savile Correspondence. Letters to and from Henry Savile, Esq., envoy at Paris, and vice-chamberlain to Charles II. and James II. including letters from his brother George, Marquess of Halifax*, ed. William Durrant Cooper ([London]: Printed for the Cambden Society, 1858; New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), pp. vi-xiv. All citations of *Savile Correspondence* refer to the Johnson Reprint edition.

<sup>4</sup> H. C. Foxcroft, "The Works of George Savile, First Marquis of Halifax," *The English Historical Review* vol. 11, no. 44 (1896): p. 703.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 703; By Foxcroft's time, many of Halifax's works have already been published. A compilation of Halifax's political pamphlets was published in 1700, and then a supplement of his other works was added to the canon in 1750. See George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, *Miscellanies By the Right Noble LORD, The Late Lord Marquess of Halifax*, ed. [Unnamed] (London: Printed for Matt. Gillyflower at the Spread-Eagle in Westminster-Hall, 1700); George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, *A Character of King Charles the Second: And Political, Moral and Miscellaneous Thoughts and Reflections*, ed. [Alexander Pope] (London: Printed for J. and R. Tonson and S. Draper in the Strand, 1750).

<sup>6</sup> H. C. Foxcroft, *The Life and Letters of Sir George Savile, Bart. First Marquis of Halifax &c.*, vols. 1-2, (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1898; New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968). All citations of *Life and Letters* refer to the Johnson Reprint edition.

Foxcroft's efforts, especially *Life and Letters*, were pivotal to Halifax scholarship. The value of her work lies not only in the biography itself, but also in the primary materials she collated and furnished for that biography. Throughout *Life and Letters*, Foxcroft traced through Halifax's life with great detail and supplemented her account with pages upon pages of correspondence cited in full as well as contemporary accounts relating to the Marquis. To be sure, many of these materials were already available to the public, but Foxcroft's biography collated it all where they related to Halifax. This made *Life and Letters* a general reference point for a bulk of primary sources relevant to the Marquis' life. Given the detail provided and the sources collated by Foxcroft, her work naturally became the common starting point for subsequent scholars studying Halifax. In 1912, Walter Raleigh wrote that "all who concern themselves with Halifax must acknowledge their great debt to the careful and exhaustive work of Miss Foxcroft."<sup>7</sup> In 1972, Foxcroft's *Life and Letters* was still considered "the standard biography" by James Conniff.<sup>8</sup> A more recent example of Foxcroft's continuing relevance was Luca G. Castellin's 2016 study on Halifax's thought, in which it listed her abridged biography, *A Character of the Trimmer*, as a biographical source.<sup>9</sup> Foxcroft's scholarship on Halifax was, therefore, a foundational beginning for modern Halifax studies that still carries relevance into the twenty-first century.

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<sup>7</sup> Walter Raleigh, Introduction to *The Complete Works of George Savile First Marquess of Halifax*, by George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, ed. Walter Raleigh (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), p. xii n1.

<sup>8</sup> James Conniff, "The Politics of Trimming: Halifax and the Acceptance of Political Controversy," *The Journal of Politics* vol. 34, no. 4 (1972): p. 1175 n6.

<sup>9</sup> Luca G. Castellin, "The International Character of a Trimmer: Interest, Reason of State, and Balance of Power in Halifax's Political Thought," *The International History Review* vol. 38, no. 4 (2016): p. 622 n4; for the abridged biography, see H. C. Foxcroft, *A Character of the Trimmer: Being a Short Life of the First Marquis of Halifax*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1946).



There was no shortage of scholars trying to understand Halifax following Foxcroft's scholarship. Her work shortly sparked numerous character studies of the Marquis. These assessments often aim to provide a general outline of his character and thought in light of the narrative and sources furnished by Foxcroft. The result was a general recognition of the depth of Halifax's character. Herbert Paul in his 1899 essay, "The Great Tractarian", made ample use of the biographical information made available by Foxcroft and proceeded to give an analysis of Halifax's political career, his literary endeavours and philosophical thought. The complexity of character that Halifax showed in all three aspects was clear in Paul's conclusion. As he wrote, "such, then, was George, Lord Halifax – Constitutional Revolutionist, Conservative Republican, pious freethinker, philosophic politician".<sup>10</sup> Raleigh approached his study of the Marquis in a similar way. In the introduction to his own 1912 compilation of Halifax's works, Raleigh familiarised his readers to the Marquis' politics and thought, drilling into his principles, his career, and his works. For Raleigh, his appreciation of the depth of Halifax was apparent in his opening paragraph. From his point of view, the Restoration politician was "the practical genius of the English Revolution, and the acutest critical genius among English politicians".<sup>11</sup> A. W. Reed, whose lecture on Halifax was transcribed in 1928, delved into his career and also his writings in the context under which they were written. Reed's conclusion from his study was no less laudatory than Paul's and Raleigh's. As he wrote, Halifax "and his friend Sir William Temple had much in common. Statesmen of remarkable prescience, men of acknowledged probity, independent and

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<sup>10</sup> Herbert Paul, "The Great Tractarian," in *Men and Letters*, ed. James Knowles (London: John Lane, the Bodley Head, 1901), p. 239. Paul's essay on Halifax is dated March 1899. See, *ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>11</sup> Raleigh, Introduction to *Works of George Savile*, p. vii.

imperturbable".<sup>12</sup> Through these early scholarly efforts, Halifax's depth of character became established. As will be seen, such interpretations of the Marquis would take on an additional layer of complexity and sophistication as the twentieth century continued.

Starting from Foxcroft, scholarly attention to Halifax's intellectual thought also began to increase. This trend can already be seen in the studies of Paul, Raleigh and Reed as they all took into account of Halifax's writings. This development continued and scholars would understand the Marquis not only as a seasoned politician, but also a profound intellectual thinker. G. P. Gooch lavished high praise on Halifax when he compared the Marquis to Thomas Hobbes, writing that both "are beyond comparison the most stimulating political writers of seventeenth-century England."<sup>13</sup> J. P. Kenyon, in his general survey of Halifax's career and works also recognised him as a political thinker in his own right.<sup>14</sup> Specialised studies of Halifax's intellectual thought have emerged as a result of this recognition. The insights offered from this area of scholarship have been numerous. Laurence Stapleton's 1941 comparative study of Halifax's thought with Sir Walter Raleigh's found similarities between the two in their political pragmatism, moderation in government and their notions of the sovereignty of the people.<sup>15</sup> In finding similarities between the two, Stapleton also found a common "humanistic Stoicism" and Machiavellianism.<sup>16</sup> The

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<sup>12</sup> A. W. Reed, "George Savile, Marquis of Halifax," in *The Social & Political Ideas of some English Thinkers of the Augustan Age A.D. 1650-1750*, ed. F. J. C. Hearnshaw (London: George G. Harrap & Company Ltd., 1928), p. 67.

<sup>13</sup> G. P. Gooch, *Political Thought in England: From Bacon to Halifax* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 154.

<sup>14</sup> J. P. Kenyon, Introduction to *Halifax: Complete Works*, by George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, ed. J. P. Kenyon (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 38.

<sup>15</sup> Laurence Stapleton, "Halifax and Raleigh," *Journal of the History of Ideas* vol. 2, no. 2 (1941): pp. 211-224.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223.

connection between Halifax and Machiavelli was taken up by scholars such as Felix Raab and J. E. Parsons jr in 1964 and 1978 respectively. Raab argued that Halifax's writings indicated that he had "digested" the lessons and ideas of Machiavelli on such notions as interest and religion.<sup>17</sup> Parsons likewise noted a connection between Halifax's realism and Machiavelli's and a particularly Machiavellian character to the former's sceptical views on religion.<sup>18</sup> Some scholars also drew connections between Halifax and modern political thought. Conniff, for instance, saw Halifax's political ideas as an embodiment of a transition point between an old political tradition, in which political conflicts were shunned, and the modern tradition, in which conflicts based on interest were accepted.<sup>19</sup> As a result of these studies on Halifax's intellectual thought, scholarly understanding of the Marquis took on an additional layer of nuance and sophistication.

It can be seen, then, that ever since Foxcroft's *Life and Letters*, there has been a lively output of scholarship on Halifax and the various aspects about him. His place in scholarship has shifted from being a neglected figure to having various studies published showing his complexity. As a result of this, scholarly understanding of Halifax has improved significantly since Foxcroft. Much of this scholarly output, however, operated from a canon of Halifax's works that remain practically fixed until the late-twentieth century. There was one early attempt to add to the Halifax canon. This was Hugh Macdonald's controversial

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<sup>17</sup> Felix Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli: A Changing Interpretation 1500-1700* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), pp. 242-249.

<sup>18</sup> J. E. Parsons, Jr., "Halifax: The Complete Trimmer Revisited," *Interpretation: a Journal of Political Philosophy* vol. 7, no. 3 (1978): pp. 73-80, 81-82.

<sup>19</sup> Conniff, "Politics of Trimming," pp. 1172-1202.

attribution of an anonymous pamphlet, *Observations Upon a Late Libel*, to the Marquis.<sup>20</sup>

Aside from this disputed attribution, the Halifax canon remained unchanged until 1989, when Mark N. Brown's three-volume *The Works of George Savile, Marquis of Halifax* was published. Brown's *Works* changed the landscape for Halifax scholarship. It added numerous works by the Marquis which were previously unpublished and widely unknown.<sup>21</sup> 29 works and a letter are included in this compilation, and only thirteen of these had seen publication.<sup>22</sup> The subject matters of these unpublished works are various, touching on such diverse topics as government reform, religion, characters of contemporaries, politics and the human condition. Among these unpublished works are several collections of Halifax's aphorisms.

Much of the scholarship on Halifax predated Brown's *Works*. As such, many had not the opportunity to make use of these new sources. The one notable exception was E. J. Dwyer, who in his 1984 thesis on Halifax had access to the manuscripts to some of these

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<sup>20</sup> Hugh Macdonald, Introduction to *Observations Upon a late Libel, called A Letter from a Person of Quality to his Friend, concerning the King's Declaration, &c*, by [George Savile, Marquis of Halifax], ed. Hugh MacDonald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), pp. 6-11. For the objections to MacDonald's attribution see, Mark N. Brown, Introduction to Part One of *The Works of George Savile, Marquis of Halifax*, by George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, ed. Mark N. Brown, vol. 1, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 14-15. For a summary of the controversy this attribution generated see, Arthur Sherbo, "The Cambridge Review," *Studies in Bibliography* vol. 52 (1999): pp. 196-197.

<sup>21</sup> Brown's compilation has been positively received by his reviewers. With the exception of *Observations upon a late Libell*, his attributions to Halifax of the works included in this compilation were not questioned. For these reviews, see Gary S. De Krey, Review of *The Works of George Savile, Marquis of Halifax*, by George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, edited by Mark N. Brown, *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* vol. 22, no. 4 (1990): pp. 676-678; Martine Watson Brownley, "Halifax and the Ideology of the Aphorism," Review of *The Works of George Savile, Marquis of Halifax*, by George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, edited by Mark N. Brown, *Modern Philology* vol. 90, no. 1 (1992): pp. 70-79; Paul Seaward, Review of *The Works of George Savile, Marquis of Halifax*, by George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, edited by Mark N. Brown, *The English Historical Review* vol. 108, no. 426 (1993): pp. 203-204.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Seaward, Review of *The Works*, p. 203.

sources and utilised them in his study.<sup>23</sup> Only a few studies focusing on Halifax have since started using Brown's new sources. Examples are Martine Brownley's study of Halifax's preference for the aphoristic genre; Castellin's aforementioned study on Halifax's thought on international relations; and of course Brown's detailed introductions on each of the seven parts of his *Works*.<sup>24</sup> Brown's *Works* therefore gave Halifax scholarship new and so far largely unexplored angles to study this Restoration politician. This current study aims to capitalise on the new ground Brown has opened. Specifically, it will focus on a specific subset of Halifax's works that has not been given enough scholarly attention. This subset is the aforementioned aphorisms.

### Capitalising on new ground and filling a historiographical gap

Halifax already had a well-established reputation as an aphorist long before Brown's 1989 *Works*. Certainly, the wider public would have had the opportunity to know of Halifax's aphoristic endeavours as early as 1700, when thirty three of his previously anonymous aphorisms were republished officially under his name.<sup>25</sup> Later in 1750 a larger collection of his aphorisms were published from documents in the possession of his granddaughter, the Countess of Burlington.<sup>26</sup> By the middle of the eighteenth century, it would seem that

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<sup>23</sup> The source was included in Dwyer's bibliography as "Commonplace Books" 1 and 2 under Leicester Record Office Finch MSS. See E. J. Dwyer, "The Marquis of Halifax and the General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century," M. Litt Thesis (Trinity College, Dublin, 1984), p. 299.

<sup>24</sup> Brownley, "Ideology of the Aphorism"; Castellin, "International Character of the Trimmer"; Mark N. Brown, Introductions to Parts One to Seven of *The Works of George Savile, Marquis of Halifax*, by George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, ed. Mark N. Brown, vols. 1-3, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

<sup>25</sup> These thirty-three aphorisms were published anonymously as *Papers of the Great Almanzor* in 1693 and subsequently republished as "Maxims of State" in 1700 in the *Miscellanies*. See also George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, *The following Maxims were found amongst the papers of the Great Almanzor* (Printed in the year M DC XCIII, 1693).

<sup>26</sup> Halifax, *A Character of Charles the Second*, pp. 63-183.

Halifax's aphorisms were being positively received by the English public. In 1755, one compiler of the genre wrote that "the *maxims of state*... drawn up by Lord HALIFAX, have been greatly esteemed; as being the result of long experience and sound policy."<sup>27</sup> This claim of Halifax's aphorisms being "greatly esteemed" might have carried some truth to it as well, for Benjamin Franklin was later found to have drawn from some of the Marquis' short pieces in Poor Richard's sayings.<sup>28</sup> Halifax's posthumous reputation as an aphorist eventually developed to the point where he could be compared to that celebrated seventeenth-century French aphorist, Francois de La Rochefoucauld. For instance, Raleigh described Halifax's published aphorisms as the "most notable English collection of Maxims, the nearest parallel and rival to the work of La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyere"; and H. R. Trevor-Roper in 1957 described Halifax as the "English La Rochefoucauld".<sup>29</sup> As such, Halifax's reputation as an aphorist was already established well before the full extent of his aphoristic endeavours was uncovered by Brown.

Despite Halifax's known practice to compose aphorisms, the extent of his endeavours in this genre as revealed by Brown's *Works* was still startling. As Brownley remarked in her review and discussion on Brown's new compilation, "from a literary perspective the new material that is most surprising and that makes Halifax a more puzzling literary case study than before is his maxims." Brownley was surprised by the large amount

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<sup>27</sup> Preface by a Friend to *A Collection of the Moral and Instructive Sentiments, Maxims, Cautions and Reflexions, Contained in the Histories of Pamela, Clarissa, and Sir Charles Grandison*, by Samuel Richardson (London: Printed for S. Richardson, 1755), p. vii.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Newcomb, "Poor Richard's Debt to Lord Halifax," *Modern Language Association* vol. 70, no. 3 (1955): pp. 535-536.

<sup>29</sup> Raleigh, Introduction to *Works of George Savile*, xxiii-xxiv; H. R. Trevor-Roper, *Historical Essays* (London: MacMillan & Co Ltd, 1957), p. 254.

of aphorisms unearthed. To give an idea of this, it was estimated that in the third volume, which comprises only of aphorisms, only 27 pages out of the 459 were published before 1989.<sup>30</sup> This is not counting the other bulk of Halifax's aphorisms in the second volume. Halifax, as Brownley noted, "apparently engaged in a single-minded and tireless pursuit of maxims."<sup>31</sup> Having devoted so much effort to this genre, Halifax was not simply a dabbling aphorist but an avid and committed practitioner of that literary art form.

Many of the studies on Halifax before 1989 did not have a specific focus on his aphorisms. Scholars often only used them as supplements with his other works.<sup>32</sup> After Brown's *Works*, scholars have duly taken notice of the new aphorisms. Paul A. Rahe, for instance, used much of the new material, including the aphorisms, to support his claim that Halifax was part of an emerging political trend that distrusted a politics motivated by religion.<sup>33</sup> Castellin also used the new aphorisms to extract Halifax's ideas and views about the reason of state.<sup>34</sup> Despite this awareness of the new short pieces, scholarly attempts to understand Halifax specifically through his aphorisms remain scarce. No attempt, particularly, has been made to read his politics in the context of these aphorisms. To be sure, there were a few notable examples that give centre stage to the short pieces. These were Brown and Brownley's discussions of them. Brown, in his insightful introductions to parts three and seven of his *Works*, discussed various aspects of Halifax's intellectual

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<sup>30</sup> Brownley, "Ideology of the Aphorism," pp. 72-73.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>32</sup> Examples of such studies include for instance, Conniff, "Politics of Trimming"; Parsons, "Trimmer Revisited". Dwyer also made use of some of the unpublished aphorisms that Brown would eventually publish. For an example of this, see Dwyer, "The Marquis of Halifax," pp. 207-208. See specifically notes 60-64

<sup>33</sup> Paul A. Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern: Classical Republicanism and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), pp. 400-401. See specifically n13.

<sup>34</sup> Castellin, "International Character of a Trimmer," p. 626 n53.

thought shown throughout his aphorisms. Among these aspects were his views of human behaviour being dominated by human nature and the passions, and of politics as being based on pragmatism and not on truth.<sup>35</sup> Brownley focused on Halifax's dedication to the aphoristic genre and attempted to explain this dedication. Accordingly, Brownley posited that Halifax preferred the aphorism because it served as a "creative solution" for explicating a political ideology, what she called "conservative constitutionalism", which resisted full explication and contained some unattractive implications that the short genre was able to hide.<sup>36</sup> Both studies, however, touched only briefly on how the values imbedded in those aphorisms impact on Halifax's politics in practice. Therefore, studies that involve his aphorisms as a key source to understanding his politics have been rare. This study aims to fill this historiographical gap by reading Halifax's politics in the context of his many aphorisms. It will suggest that the aphorisms should be regarded as an important source for understanding the Marquis' politics between the Exclusion Crisis and the Glorious Revolution.

There are good reasons to assign importance to the aphorisms in a study of Halifax's politics. The first reason is that they are a more candid reflection of his internal character. Brown has cautioned scholars about taking Halifax's honesty for granted when reading into his published political pamphlets. The main reason for this was that his political pamphlets were written primarily to influence public opinion. As propaganda pieces, the candidness of Halifax's political pamphlets should not be taken for granted. As Brown himself wrote,

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<sup>35</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part Three, pp. 128-134; Brown, Introduction to Part Seven, pp. 12-22.

<sup>36</sup> Brownley, "Ideology of the Aphorism," pp. 74-77.



It must be remembered that these pamphlets were intended, not as the mere publicizing of the author's own views on certain issues, but as anonymous propaganda designed to influence public opinion, and with it political behaviour.

Halifax was too shrewd a student of human nature to offend those whom he hoped to persuade, so that one must try to distinguish – where possible – his private opinions from what he expressed for public consumption.<sup>37</sup>

To be sure, Brown acknowledged that the content of the pamphlets do coincide with Halifax's private opinions "to a great extent", but overall he cautioned the reading of the pamphlets as explicit expressions of the Marquis' politics.<sup>38</sup> By contrast, the aphorisms may be considered a more candid expression of Halifax's actual opinions. His political aphorisms were described as a "spontaneous and candid revelation of Halifax's private opinion of the men, the events, and the conditions of contemporary political life."<sup>39</sup> Additionally, Halifax's miscellaneous aphorisms, which touch on matters beyond politics, were also found to be "the product of years of gradually accumulated observations, insights, and reflections".<sup>40</sup> The aphorisms, therefore, may be regarded as a more accurate reflection of Halifax's private character as opposed to his political pamphlets which were published primarily for political reasons.

The aphorism as a genre, too, has some important implications in this study of Halifax. The genre should not only be seen as a mere literary preference, but a genre that

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<sup>37</sup> Mark N. Brown, General Introduction to *The Works of George Savile, Marquis of Halifax*, by George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, ed. Mark N. Brown, vol. 1, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. xxiii.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. xxiii.

<sup>39</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part Three, p. 128.

<sup>40</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part Seven, p. 9.

carries with it a part of the aphorist's character. Ben Grant, in his survey of the various characteristics of the aphorism, put forward the case about the personal nature of this genre. For Grant, every aphorist gives to their aphorisms two personal signatures. Authority, the giving the aphorisms a mark of ownership is one them. As Grant puts it, "aphorisms are distinguished from proverbs on the basis that they are attributed to a named individual, an author, while proverbs are anonymous." <sup>41</sup> But to Grant, there was an additional signature that goes beyond the mere attachment of an aphorist's name to their short pieces. The second aspect of this "double signature" is the worldview the aphorist imbues into those short pieces. In making this claim, Grant explicitly borrowed from Murray S. Davies, who wrote that,

What distinguishes the great aphorists is that all their aphorisms can be traced back to a common attitude toward the world. Behind their many aphorisms stands a single principle applied to a variety of topics: Pascal's 'self-fragility', La Rochefoucauld's 'self-interest', Schopenhauer's 'self-denial', Nietzsche's 'self-empowerment'. <sup>42</sup>

The aphorism is therefore a highly personal part of the aphorist in the sense that they also carry their worldview. Halifax's own aphorisms can be interpreted through this angle too. This study will read his politics in the context of the worldview imbedded in those aphorisms.

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<sup>41</sup> Ben Grant, *The Aphorism and Other Short Forms* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 67.

<sup>42</sup> Murray S. Davies, "Aphorisms and Cliches: The Generation and Dissipation of Conceptual Charisma," *Annual Review of Sociology* vol. 25 (1999): 256; Grant quotes this in full as well. See Grant, *The Aphorism*, 67.

### An interpretation from aphorisms

By using Halifax's aphorisms this study will offer a unique perspective on him in an area that is still undergoing developments. This is the interpretation of the Marquis' politics and political career. Ever since Halifax's death in 1695, contemporaries and historians have grappled with the puzzle of explaining his seemingly inconsistent political conduct. Views about his politics have undergone major shifts over the centuries. Between his death and the middle of the twentieth century, two main interpretations can be detected. The first interpretation tended to see Halifax's inconsistent career as being due to a lack of political principles. Bishop Gilbert Burnet, a contemporary and associate of Halifax, was among the first to make such an assessment. In private, Burnet found Halifax to be amiable. "He was always talking of morality and friendship. He was punctual in all payments, and just in all his private dealings." But in the realm of politics Burnet found Halifax to be an inconsistent man, as he wrote that "with relation to the public, he went backwards and forwards, and changed sides so often, that in conclusion no side trusted him." Part of this inconsistency was suggested to be related to a lack of principles. For instance, Halifax's apparently republican ideals certainly did not bear out as he took part in some of Charles II's most repressive policies against the Whig party, who themselves had republican tendencies. In Burnet's own words, Halifax "seemed full of commonwealth notions: yet he went into the worst part of King Charles's reign." The resulting image drawn by Burnet was a Halifax whose inconsistent politics could not be explained by any discernible principles. Ambition to

raise his family's status seemed more likely to be Halifax's driving force from Burnet's point of view. As he wrote, Halifax's "heart was much set on raising his family".<sup>43</sup>

Among contemporaries, this was by no means unanimous. For instance, Halifax's domestic chaplain, Alexander Sion, took the opposite position. Sion was among the earliest to attempt a compilation of some of the Marquis' works after his death, entitled "Saviliana".<sup>44</sup> No such compilation under that name was ever published, but the manuscript did contain his general appraisal of Halifax. Sion's assessment of him was laudatory. In contrast to Burnet's assessment, Halifax was described as a man who "always indeavoured to raise his Country more than his Family, and besides Titles and Honors, never got anything by the Crown." Furthermore, his loyalty to the Stuart dynasty was implied, as Sion wrote that Halifax was also "the wise and faithful Counseller of Kings, one of whom might have reigned more quietly, and the other longer had they given into the methods proposed by his Lordship."<sup>45</sup> Far from being the inconsistent politician who lacked principles, Halifax was consistent in his patriotism and faithfulness to his nation and his monarchs.

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<sup>43</sup> Gilbert Burnet, *Bishop Burnet's History of His Own Time: From the Restoration of Charles II. to the Treaty of Peace at Utrecht, in the Reign of Queen Anne. A New Edition with Historical and Biographical Notes, and Fifty-One Portraits*, vol. 1, (London: William Smith, 113, Fleet Street, 1838), pp. 181-182.

<sup>44</sup> The manuscript was entitled "Saviliana or The Works of George Savile Late Marquis of Halifax In four Tracts The Character of a Trimmer A Letter to a Dissenter The Anatomy of an Equivalent and Advice to a Daughter". The authorship of this manuscript is not explicit. Foxcroft thought it was Halifax's other domestic chaplain, William Mompesson but it has been strongly shown by Brown that this was Alexander Sion by comparing the handwriting in the manuscript with two letters signed by Sion. For a discussion of authorship of this manuscript, see Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, pp. xii-xiv; Brown, General Introduction to *Works*, p. xxix n1, n2.

<sup>45</sup> The excerpt from "Saviliana" has been printed in Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 2, p. 196.

Burnet's view, however, tended to prevail with commentators over the succeeding century and a half. David Hume, writing in the mid-seventeenth century, saw Halifax merely as a political intriguer. He acknowledged his association with a group of political moderates known as "Trimmers", but he qualified this by suggesting that the Marquis was animated to this position more by ambition than by integrity. As he wrote of Halifax, "this conduct [of political neutrality between parties], which is more natural to men of integrity than of ambition, could not however procure him the former character; and he was always, with reason, regarded as an intriguer rather than a patriot."<sup>46</sup> Nineteenth-century historian Sir James Mackintosh characterised Halifax in a similarly negative light. The Marquis, according to Mackintosh's assessment, was a disillusioned politician who later turned to his own ambitions at the expense of political principles. As Mackintosh wrote,

His [Halifax's] political speculations being soon found incapable of being reduced to practice, melted away in the sunshine of royal favour; the disappointment of visionary hopes led him to despair of great improvements, to despise the moderate services which an individual may render to the community, and to turn with disgust from public principles to the indulgence of his own vanity and ambition.<sup>47</sup>

Halifax survived through wit and eloquence and "of these various means of advancement, he availed himself for a time with little scruple and with some success." But his character defects led to successes which were short-lived. Among the most important was that "he had too keen a perception of human weakness and folly not to find many pretexts and

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<sup>46</sup> David Hume, *The History of Great Britain, from the Accession of James I. To the Revolution in 1688*, vol. 8, (Dublin: Printed by James Williams in Skinner-Row, 1780), p. 172.

<sup>47</sup> Sir James Mackintosh, *History of the Revolution in England in 1688. comprising a view of the Reign of James II. from his accession, to the enterprise of the Prince of Orange* (London: Printed for Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green & Longman, 1834), p. 8.

temptations for changing his measures and deserting his connections.”<sup>48</sup> Mackintosh acknowledged that Halifax had talents, but he saw few principles in the man. Hence the portraits drawn from Hume’s and Mackintosh’s renderings were unflattering. From their points of views, Halifax was a politician who lacked virtuous principles and was more inclined towards political intriguing and furthering his own ambitions.

A second interpretation, closer to Sion’s, would emerge directly opposed to these negative views. Such interpretations saw Halifax in a more sympathetic light, and concepts of moderation, pragmatism and patriotism would be affixed upon the politician. Macaulay, writing in the same century as Mackintosh, was among the first proponents of Halifax as a virtuous moderate. His generous assessment benefitted from the correct belief that the Marquis penned the famous *The Character of a Trimmer*, which, on the surface, professed itself to be a defence of political moderation.<sup>49</sup> Unlike Hume, Macaulay sympathised with Halifax and his association as a trimmer. From Macaulay’s point of view, Halifax was not the political intriguer that Hume painted him to be. Rather, his character and his conduct were guided by the virtues of moderation, representative of a political “trimmer” who would trim the sails between political extremes and balance them out.<sup>50</sup> Such views were expressed in his *Essay on Sir William Temple*, but he developed them to a fuller extent in his *History of*

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<sup>48</sup> Mackintosh, *History of the Revolution*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>49</sup> Macaulay made direct references to Halifax’s *Character of a Trimmer* in his *Essay on Sir William Temple*. The cautiousness of his claim that Halifax authored *Character of a Trimmer* reflected the fact that the pamphlet was still sometimes attributed to Halifax’s uncle and another political moderate of the time, Sir William Coventry. See, Foxcroft, “The Works of George Savile,” p. 704.

<sup>50</sup> Macaulay *Essay on Sir William Temple*, pp. 74-75. Macaulay’s comments about trimming between heat and cold, despotism and anarchy, Catholicism and Protestant Dissent were direct references to Halifax’s pamphlet. Cf. George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, “The Character of a Trimmer,” in *The Works of George Savile, Marquis of Halifax*, ed. Mark N. Brown, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 243.

*England*. In a passage that summarised Halifax from Macaulay's point of view, he wrote that,

Such a man [as Halifax] could not long be constant to any band of political allies. He must not, however, be confounded with the vulgar crowd of renegades. For though, like them, he passed from side to side, his transition was always in the direction opposite to theirs. He had nothing in common with those who fly from extreme to extreme, and who regard the party which they have deserted with an animosity far exceeding that of consistent enemies. His place was between the hostile divisions of the community, and he never wandered far beyond the frontier of either.<sup>51</sup>

Macaulay's portrait was vastly different from Hume's and Mackintosh's. Halifax's constant switching of sides was not because he lacked principles, but because he had principles for which he stood. Such principles were that of the "trimmer".<sup>52</sup>

Half a century later, Foxcroft's *Life and Letters* would complement Macaulay's portrait. The portrait she drew, however, was more implicit than explicit. She seemed more content with letting the evidence speak for itself than giving an overarching analysis on Halifax. Indeed, at the conclusion of *Life and Letters*, she conceded that "the scheme of this work precludes any formal attempt at analysis, for which sufficient materials are now before the reader."<sup>53</sup> Such was Foxcroft's approach that Kenyon commented that her *Life and Letters* was "an enormous quarry of fact piled on fact, like the two- and three-decker lives of

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<sup>51</sup> Macaulay, *History of England*, vol. 1, pp. 244-245.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.

<sup>53</sup> Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 2, p. 192.

Victorian statesmen on which it may have been consciously modelled.”<sup>54</sup> Despite this, Foxcroft’s narrative and arrangement of the primary sources painted an image of Halifax that added more substance to Macaulay’s interpretation of a virtuous moderate. Foxcroft did not stress the importance of a “trimming” principle in Halifax; but a politics that was against brash extremes could be seen through the details.<sup>55</sup> The general image of Halifax from Foxcroft’s narrative was a politician who was a patriot, pragmatist and proponent of moderation.<sup>56</sup> These views were subsequently expressed in her slightly altered abridged biography, *A Character of the Trimmer* in 1946. As Foxcroft concluded this later work, she wrote that Halifax’s “own general policy whether in office or in opposition, was simple and consistent.” In foreign policy, “his first object was always to secure these islands and their dependencies from foreign interference, dynastic or ecclesiastical.” As for his politics at home, “he was equally concerned to preserve, in the interest of the average citizen, our Laws, our Liberties, and our Unity as a nation”. For Halifax, such domestic aspirations involved the balancing of Crown and Parliament and to “‘trim’ the barque of State as to keep her on an even keel.”<sup>57</sup> To Foxcroft, Halifax was a moderate politician who worked for the good of the English nation from a pragmatic rather than an ideological standpoint.

As scholarship on Halifax developed after Foxcroft, it was this second interpretation of the Marquis as a virtuous moderate that established itself by the early-twentieth century.

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<sup>54</sup> Kenyon, Introduction to *Halifax: Complete Works*, p. 25.

<sup>55</sup> Take, for example, Foxcroft’s rendering of Halifax’s actions during the Exclusion Crisis, or on the subsequent reaction against the Whigs by Charles’ government. In the former, Foxcroft showed Halifax as urging caution due to the possibility of another civil war, and in the latter he was shown pushing for reconciliation with the Whigs. See Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 233-249, 302-303, 323-325.

<sup>56</sup> A similar interpretation arose from Kenyon’s reading of Foxcroft. See Kenyon, Introduction to *Halifax: Complete Works*, p. 25.

<sup>57</sup> Foxcroft, *Character of the Trimmer*, p. 340.



Paul, Raleigh, and Reed all interpreted Halifax's conduct along these lines. Paul wrote of Halifax that "he was more thoroughly imbued than any other Englishman with the English spirit of compromise"; Raleigh enthusiastically followed Macaulay in applying the metaphor of the trimmer to Halifax's politics; and Reed lamented that seventeenth-century contemporaries had "failed to understand Halifax's contempt of party loyalty and his virtues as a 'trimmer.'" <sup>58</sup> This second interpretation still echoed as the century progressed. Writing in 1969, Kenyon believed that Macaulay's characterisation quoted above was "still the most accurate and perceptive analysis of Halifax's conduct we have". <sup>59</sup> No longer was this Restoration politician the inconsistent man who lacked the principles to commit to a position. Rather, modern scholarship has decisively sided with Macaulay and Foxcroft in reassessing Halifax as a man imbued with the virtues of patriotism, pragmatism and moderation.

Hitherto, the interpretations of Halifax's politics and career fall along two identifiable lines. The first asserted that they were more or less evidence of a lack of principles, whereas the second defended him by asserting otherwise. As the dust settled in favour of the second position, scholars began to move past this dichotomy between principles and lack thereof. Scholars now accepted that Halifax's political conduct was motivated by consistent themes and began to focus on defining those themes beyond the categories of patriotism, pragmatism and moderation. These scholars would seek out these themes in Halifax's various writings. This interpretive approach to understanding Halifax's politics does overlap

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<sup>58</sup> Paul, "Tractarian," p. 210; Raleigh, Introduction to *Works of George Savile*, pp. vii-viii; Reed, "George Savile," pp. 67-68.

<sup>59</sup> Kenyon, Introduction to *Halifax: Complete Works*, pp. 23-24.

with that adopted by the specialised studies on his intellectual thought. However, rather than focusing solely on the themes of his thought in isolation, this approach involved using those themes to characterise his politics. This approach of finding consistent themes between Halifax's politics and his intellectual works would not have been endorsed by all scholars. Brown, for instance, saw inherent risks of misinterpretations from "the writing of history that tried to make sense of a man's life more in terms of his self-consistency than his development."<sup>60</sup>

Despite the inherent risks, works in this category have offered insightful suggestions as to possible themes to Halifax's politics. Ruth Patricia Trickey's 1951 study can be considered an early example of this. Accepting the biographical details already established by existing scholarship, Trickey instead focused on drawing out a consistent character throughout such aspects as Halifax's political career, writings and even his composition style.<sup>61</sup> For Trickey, the unifying theme found in Halifax was his simultaneous recognition of the ideal and the real that permeated throughout those categories.<sup>62</sup> Another example is a 1975 study done by Edward Millican. Millican sought to show that Halifax's political theory was not that of the Whigs, but rather that he was "an articulate spokesman for the Tory position", which supported a monarchy who ruled according to the laws.<sup>63</sup> The approach he took to show this was by an examination of Halifax's writings in conjunction with an account

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<sup>60</sup> Brown, General Introduction to *Works*, p. xxii.

<sup>61</sup> Ruth Patricia Trickey, "A Study of Sir George Saville : First Marquis of Halifax," MA Thesis (Butler University, 1951).

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 51-53.

<sup>63</sup> Edward Millican, "The Political Theory of the Marquis of Halifax," PhD Dissertation (University of California, 1975), pp. 20-21.

of his political actions. Indeed, Millican's explicit goal in his study was to set Halifax's political ideas in relation to "the conceptions of the polity prevalent in the seventeenth century England, and the political struggles in which Halifax was an active and important participant."<sup>64</sup> In doing so, his study attempted to show that the Marquis was not only more Tory in political thought but also consistent with this in his actual politics. Parsons' 1978 study on Halifax's intellectual debt to Machiavelli can also be considered a part of this trend of interpretations too. In assessing Halifax's thought in relation to Machiavelli's, Parsons suggested that the Marquis' political conduct was informed by a Machiavellian view of religion.<sup>65</sup> As can be seen, this emerging interpretive approach to studying Halifax's politics have yielded some suggestive ways of understanding it beyond such concepts as moderation or pragmatism.

This study considers itself part of this trend of interpretive approaches. It accepts that Halifax's political conduct was not a mere manifestation of a lack of principles. But rather than seeking to explain his conduct through the common categories discussed above, this study aims to identify Halifax's politics with a worldview that was deeply influenced by his ideas about the human condition. Studies touching on Halifax's views about the human condition are not new. For instance, A. G. Fogg's 1965 thesis on Halifax's political thought touched on the topic of his views of human nature. Specifically, Fogg emphasised that Halifax's political thought rested much on the assumptions he held about human

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>65</sup> Parsons, "Trimmer Revisited," pp. 84-86.

behaviour.<sup>66</sup> Conniff's study also identified Halifax's epistemological scepticism and cynicism of human nature in explaining the modernity of his thought.<sup>67</sup> Dwyer's study serves as another notable example in this area, as it drew a contextual connection between Halifax' intellectual thought with such traditions as Pyrrhonian scepticism and the early-modern *moralistes'* views about human nature.<sup>68</sup> Finally, Brown's aforementioned introductions to Halifax's aphorisms are of great relevance to this area of scholarship. This is especially the case with his introduction to part seven in which he discussed the salient characteristics of the Marquis' views on human nature.<sup>69</sup> It can be seen, then, that quite a few studies already touch on Halifax's views about the human condition. However, whereas these studies are confined to Halifax's intellectual thought, this study will specifically aim to show how his views in this area can be used to understand his politics in practice.

In keeping with the focus on Halifax's aphorisms, this study will extract his views of the human condition primarily from those short pieces. It is true that not all his aphorisms are consistent in their propositions. Brown, for instance, found some contradictory remarks in Halifax's views about the persistence of an individual's nature throughout one's life. Despite Halifax's ambiguous remarks on this matter, Brown nonetheless found a consistent attitude that tended towards the rejection of a persistent nature.<sup>70</sup> In a similar way, the reading of the aphorisms in this study finds a common attitude that Halifax applied to a variety of subject matters. This common attitude can be characterised as a deep acceptance

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<sup>66</sup> A. G. Fogg, "Halifax and his Critics: The Political Thought of Sir George Savile, 1<sup>st</sup> Marquis of Halifax," M.Sc Dissertation (University of London, London School of Economics, 1965), pp. 32-39.

<sup>67</sup> Conniff, "Politics of Trimming," pp. 1181-1184, 1188-1189.

<sup>68</sup> Dwyer, "The Marquis of Halifax," pp. 115-136, 192-198.

<sup>69</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part Seven, pp. 12-22.

<sup>70</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part Seven, p. 16.

of the boundaries or limitations believed by Halifax to be inherent in the human condition. For Halifax, such boundaries principally relate to the human mind and human character. Of the mind, Halifax believed it to be limited in what it can know with certainty; of human character, he believed that it was inevitably dominated by nature and the passions rather than reason. Halifax incorporated this acceptance of human imperfection in his approach to a variety of subjects within the aphorisms. The aphorisms, therefore, contain Halifax's particular approach to the world, or a worldview in other words. Reading Halifax's political actions in the context of his aphorisms, this study will suggest that those actions were characteristic of him in the sense that it aligned with his worldview shown in those short pieces. In this way, this study suggests merely a consistency between the two rather than a positive confirmation of causality. Nonetheless, the specific interpretation that emerges from this study is that the spirit of Halifax's politics resonated with his sceptical outlook of the human condition.

All this being said, this study does not consider itself isolated from the larger historiographical context. This study will take advantage of relevant developments in the historiography of seventeenth-century England. Indeed, much of this development provide additional context for this study's understanding of Halifax's career and the times in which he lived. The studies that include a detailed account of Restoration politics have provided helpful peripheral information on Halifax's political career. Kenyon's *Robert Spencer, Earl of Sunderland*, for instance, provided useful information on Halifax's interactions with national

policy during his time in government between 1679 and 1685.<sup>71</sup> Wider studies on the politics and sentiments prevalent during the Restoration era also help put Halifax's politics in a better context. For example, though Halifax has been largely credited with defeating the second Exclusion Bill in 1680, subsequent studies have found that the Bill was never likely to pass, with or without Halifax's aid.<sup>72</sup> On a wider scale, Tim Harris' two-volume "social history of politics" on the Restoration era provided helpful perspectives into the contemporary atmosphere of the times in which Halifax lived.<sup>73</sup> Such insights help one get a better sense of the issues that Halifax and his contemporaries were grappling with. As suggested here, this study will benefit from the various insights offered by these wider studies about seventeenth-century England.

Just as scholarship on the wider Restoration era has relevance to this study, the reverse will also be true, though in a modest capacity. Insofar as the issue of political moderates or "Trimmers" during the late-Restoration period is a subject of scholarly interest, this study helps elucidate the worldview of one the proponents of this moderate position. Tim Harris' work showing the divide between the Whigs and Tories during this period indicated the need to understand the middle position. Having shown both the Whig

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<sup>71</sup> J. P. Kenyon, *Robert Spencer, Earl of Sunderland, 1641-1702* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1975). Other examples in this category include, J. R. Jones, *Charles II: Royal Politician* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987); Ronald Hutton, *Charles the Second, King of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); John Miller, *James II: a Study in Kingship* (London: Methuen, 1989); K. H. D. Haley, *The First Earl of Shaftesbury* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

<sup>72</sup> Lionel K. J. Glassey, "Shaftesbury and the Exclusion Crisis," in *Anthony Ashley Cooper, First Earl of Shaftesbury 1621-1683*, ed. John Spurr (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 224-225. Other examples of wider studies on the politics of the time also include Douglas R. Lacey, *Dissent and Parliamentary Politics in England, 1661-1689: a Study in the Perpetuation and Tempering of Parliamentarianism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1969); John Miller, *Popery and Politics in England 1660-1668* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

<sup>73</sup> Tim Harris, *Restoration: Charles II and his Kingdoms, 1660-1685* (London: Allen Lane, 2005), pp. 16-20; Tim Harris, *Revolution: The Great Crisis of the British Monarchy, 1685-1720* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), pp. 15-18.

and Tory positions during Charles II's reign, Harris cautioned the reader from drawing a simplistic Whig-Tory divide from his analysis. He acknowledged that there were moderate Whigs and Tories, as well as a more independent position.<sup>74</sup> As he wrote,

The subject of trimmers is an important one, and deserves fuller treatment than can be afforded here. There certainly were people who saw themselves as occupying a middle position between the two extremes, who espoused an ideological position which they saw as being distinct from that of either party, and who often applied the label of 'trimmer' to themselves. What is less clear is whether we can we talk about the trimmers as a distinctive and coherent third force in politics at this time.<sup>75</sup>

This study will not answer such questions about a moderate or "trimmer" party. But it will show the distinctive worldview of one of the most notable moderates during the late-Stuart era. By doing so it offers a case study from which to extrapolate some potential philosophical and ideological motivations of the moderate position during this period.

### Final notes on methodology

It remains to say a few words about the methodology of this study as well as the period chosen for study. Hazards no doubt exist when one's chief primary sources are aphorisms. The most notable hazard is that of interpretation. The short and brief nature of aphorisms inevitably presents ambiguity and imprecision with regards to their meaning. Unlike treatises with more exact definitions and commentary, the aphorism's ambiguity

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<sup>74</sup> Harris, *Restoration*, pp. 323-326.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 325.

means that there are a number of open interpretations that can be imposed upon them.

This leads to the potential issue where one reads a specific meaning into an aphorism and another might read a different meaning. To circumvent any confusion as far as possible, this study has made conscious efforts to clarify its interpretation on a particular aphorism where multiple meanings are a likely possibility.

There is also a notable hazard in reading Halifax's politics in the context of a selected set of aphorisms. This hazard is the potential for other sets of aphorisms to contradict the selected set. This is particularly a problem where advice of an aphorism bearing consistency with one of his actions is contradicted by the advice of another aphorism. Indeed, due to the sheer number of Halifax's short pieces, this possibility seems unavoidable. This study, however, does not intend to resolve such contradictions and this seems justified given Halifax's own character. Halifax in his aphorisms revealed himself to be someone who rejected the idea of universal guides to action. This is to say that he did not believe that any practical advice was absolutely correct at all times. As he wrote in one aphorism, "those who lean upon general maxims, will often have terrible falls. A maxim without distinguishing, is a crutch for a lame understanding."<sup>76</sup> In another aphorism, Halifax similarly reflected, "dangerous to come neer a fool that is charged with a Maxime; hee lets it of right or wrong, for want of knowing how to apply it."<sup>77</sup> From these aphorisms, it seems apparent that Halifax believed every situation had its own appropriate line of conduct or maxim, and that the maxim's advice might be invalidated when inappropriately applied to another

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<sup>76</sup> George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, "Miscellanys," in *The Works of George Savile, Marquis of Halifax*, ed. Mark N. Brown, vol. 3, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 181: 22-24.

<sup>77</sup> George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, "Miscellaneous Maxims," in *The Works of George Savile, Marquis of Halifax*, ed. Mark N. Brown, vol. 3, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 390-391: 30-3.



situation. Considering this, Halifax would have been comfortable with jotting down seemingly contradictory advice because each had its own practical validity when applied within an appropriate framework. In terms of applying the aphorisms to Halifax's political actions, the task then becomes less about resolving inconsistencies between them and more about ensuring that the aphorisms chosen fit plausibly into the context of those actions. This latter approach is the one taken in this study.

This study's focus on the period in question requires some explanation also. The question might be asked as to why this study specifically focuses on the period between the Exclusion Crisis and the Glorious Revolution. One could go further and inquire why the focus should not be on the entirety of Halifax's life. To these questions two answers explain the period chosen. The first is that Halifax likely did not begin writing and compiling his aphorisms until the Exclusion Crisis. From internal and circumstantial evidence and cross referencing from other works by Halifax, Brown suggested that the likely composition period for his aphorisms were between the early 1680s to the last few years of his life, with a large majority of them likely written towards the latter period.<sup>78</sup> This puts the likely composition dates within the studied period. No detailed diary or journal revealing Halifax's thoughts and politics over his life have survived. In light of this, the aphorisms under these circumstances can be considered an alternative source for exploring his internal character during the chosen period.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, there is also danger in extending the application of these aphorisms too far back in time. This is because Halifax's character at the time he

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<sup>78</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part Three, p. 127; Brown, Introduction to Part Seven, pp. 8-9.

<sup>79</sup> Two detailed diary journals were known to exist. Both, however, have been destroyed by the nineteenth-century. See Foxcroft, *Character of the Trimmer*, p. ix.

wrote his aphorisms might have differed from when he first began his career. As Brown suggested, “Halifax’s writings inevitably reveal him in various ways, but when studied as the key to his politics they can be misleading. One reason is that they all fall within the last quarter of his life, and what is characteristic of his last fifteen years is not always so of his first forty-five.”<sup>80</sup> By focusing on Halifax’s politics during the likely period over which he wrote his aphorisms, this study mitigates the risk of falling into this danger of misapplying them.

The second reason was that the Exclusion Crisis and the Glorious Revolution contained what can be argued as Halifax’s most notable political decisions. This was the general impression of many who studied him. Raleigh, for instance, wrote of Halifax that “the greatest of his achievements, it will probably be agreed, was the rejection of the Exclusion Bill in 1680 by the House of Lords.”<sup>81</sup> Kenyon remarked that Halifax’s fame lay in his actions during the Exclusion Crisis and the Revolution; and Brownley also described Halifax’s rejection of the Exclusion Bill and his subsequent role in the Revolution as “the two major achievements of his career”.<sup>82</sup> For these reasons, the period chosen can be justified on the basis that it comprised the core of Halifax’s political career as many scholars understood it. Based on the considerations above, it was thought the most ideal to confine the period of this study to between the Exclusion Crisis and the Glorious Revolution.

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<sup>80</sup> Brown, General Introduction to *Works*, p. xxiii

<sup>81</sup> Raleigh, Introduction to *Works of George Savile*, p. xiii.

<sup>82</sup> Kenyon, Introduction to *Halifax: Complete Works*, p. 12; Brownley, “Ideology of the Aphorism,” p. 70.

Finally, it should be noted that the goal of this study is not to challenge the current political narrative on Halifax. This study is essentially an interpretive rereading of Halifax's political career. This means that the overarching political narrative regarding Halifax will follow more or less from established scholarship. The methodological implications of this is that the biographical details of Halifax in this study is based on that which has already been established chiefly by Foxcroft and supplemented by others such as Brown as well as by the wider Restoration scholarship. Where appropriate, Halifax's letters or relevant accounts from contemporaries will be duly cited, but no attempt will be made nor new archival correspondences will be specifically brought forth to create a new narrative of the actual course of Halifax's political career.

## **Chapter 2 – A Prelude**

Before diving into a reading of Halifax's politics in terms of his aphorisms, a brief introduction will be given as to his early life and career. This brief chapter gives a short narrative of Halifax's life and career up to 1678, just before the advent of the Popish Plot which ushered in the Exclusion Crisis. This supplies an introductory narrative to the succeeding chapters.

### **George Savile's early life**

George Savile was born on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1633 to Yorkshire Baronet Sir William Savile and Anne Coventry. The Saviles, a wealthy and prominent Yorkshire family, boasted a somewhat illustrious pedigree so that George Savile, from birth, could already point to a few prominent connections by blood; the most notable examples being his great-uncle the Earl of Strafford and his maternal grandfather Lord Keeper Coventry. Notable figures more contemporary to Savile's lifetime included his cousin, Thomas Thynne, the future Viscount Weymouth; his uncles William and Henry Coventry; and perhaps most famously his other uncle, Anthony Ashley Cooper, future Earl of Shaftesbury.<sup>83</sup> Yet blood connections did not always guarantee amicable relations in person. Though these connections furnished him well with political allies, Savile later found Ashley Cooper among his most formidable political opponents. Nor could familial eminence spare the Saviles from the indiscriminate hardships which civil war brought.

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<sup>83</sup> Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 8-9.

Born but years before the English Civil War, it was almost inevitable that Savile was not without his own experiences of those conflicts. His father, though he supported the popular cause during the Short Parliament and the beginning of the Long Parliament, ultimately sided with the Crown. As is always possible in times of conflict, Sir William perished whilst serving as an officer in the King's army; the young Savile therefore lost his father during this tumultuous period by the age of 11. As for, Savile himself during this time, he and other members of the family, had to constantly repair to locales of safety as the conflict raged on.<sup>84</sup> It has even been claimed that Savile was present at and endured with his mother the siege of Castle Sheffield in 1644.<sup>85</sup> After the death of Savile's father, Parliament also took an active interest in Savile's wardship, granting Parliamentary Lord Wharton the guardianship of the child and care of his education in addition to a yearly allowance drawn from his estates.<sup>86</sup>

However, "it is doubtful", as noted by Foxcroft, "whether Lord Wharton ever succeeded, even temporarily, in enforcing his claims."<sup>87</sup> For, coincidence or not, it was around this time when Lady Savile decided to send her son abroad for an education on Continental soil. During his time on the Continent, where it was likely he gained proficiency in the French language, he visited a variety of locations; he was in Angers by December 1647, Leghorn by October 1649, Naples in the following November, Rome by 1649/50 and finally again in France, Orleans until 1651. Savile apparently returned to England by the time

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 12-15.

<sup>85</sup> Reed, "George Savile," p. 47.

<sup>86</sup> Foxcroft, *Character of the Trimmer*, p. 7.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

he had come of age in 1654.<sup>88</sup> Though the Parliamentarian's victory meant the loss of property for many landed Royalists, the Savile assets were kept more or less intact, perhaps due to his mother's prudent management. And so when Savile returned home around the age of 25, his financial position was substantially better off than most of his fellow Cavaliers.<sup>89</sup>

There is scant information about Savile between his return to England and the Restoration of Charles in 1660. There are, however, suggestions of his involvement in the Royalist activities of the time, with his possible association with an abortive rising in 1655.<sup>90</sup> Though Savile was not among those arrested, there was in fact interest in detaining him for information about the rising.<sup>91</sup> Whether Savile played any important part in bringing about the Restoration of Charles II is unknown. What is certain was that he sat in the House of Commons jointly representing Pontefract with William Lowther during the Convention Parliament, which was responsible for recalling the King. Savile's time in the Commons did not turn out to be the start to what was eventually a long career in politics. For whatever reason he never sat in that House again after the Convention's dissolution.<sup>92</sup>

Being outside of the political arena that was Parliament, Savile still held local government offices, serving as a deputy-lieutenant and JP of the West Riding and a

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<sup>88</sup> H. C. Foxcroft, "New Light on George Savile, First Marquis of Halifax, 'The Trimmer'," *History* vol. 26, no. 103 (1941): p. 177; Foxcroft, *Character of the Trimmer*, pp. 7-9.

<sup>89</sup> Foxcroft, *Character of the Trimmer*, p. 9.

<sup>90</sup> Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 23-25; Brown, Introduction to Part One, p. 3.

<sup>91</sup> Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, p. 25.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28

commissioner for executing the Corporation Act in the county of York.<sup>93</sup> Through his political connections at the time, with his uncle Sir William Coventry and the Duke of Buckingham being his most notable patrons, attempts were made to obtain for Savile a peerage and his entry into the House of Lords. However, it was not until the fall of the chief minister at the time, the Earl of Clarendon, that this was possible; for Clarendon, animated by his rivalry with Savile's patrons, strongly objected to granting the young Baronet a noble title when the suggestion was raised. When Clarendon eventually fell from grace in 1667 the road laid clear for Savile's entry into the peerage. The writs were issued in January of 1668, and on the 23<sup>rd</sup> he was thus summoned to sit in the House of Lords as Baron Savile of Eland and Viscount Halifax.<sup>94</sup>

### Halifax's early political career

Halifax's political career could be argued to have begun in earnest during the events of 1672, in which he was admitted into the Privy Council. During the largely unpopular second Anglo-Dutch War of 1672 to 1674, Halifax was chosen to embark on a diplomatic mission to the French King to reaffirm England's commitment to the Anglo-French alliance.<sup>95</sup> Like many of his contemporaries, however, Halifax saw France as the greater threat on the Continent and sought leniency towards the Dutch whenever possible.<sup>96</sup> When Halifax and

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<sup>93</sup> Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, p. 32; Brown, Introduction to Part One, p. 4.

<sup>94</sup> Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 39-40, 53-57.

<sup>95</sup> For an account of Halifax's diplomatic mission see, *ibid.*, pp. 70-97.

<sup>96</sup> For English attitudes towards Charles' foreign policy see, Harris, *Restoration*, pp. 71-72; for Halifax's views with regard to the Dutch during his mission, see Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 90-93. For his views on French foreign policy and monarchical absolutism see, Halifax, "The Character of a Trimmer," pp. 231-237; George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, "A Rough Draught of a New Modell at Sea," in *The Works of George Savile, Marquis of Halifax*, ed. Mark N. Brown, vol. 1, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 299-300.

his ambassadorial colleagues returned from their diplomatic mission without any tangible gains, Parliament turned on the government when it met in 1673. By then, Charles' pro-French policies had led many to suspect that the King was attempting to establish Catholicism in England. The league with France notwithstanding, Charles also issued a Declaration of Indulgence back in 1672, which favoured not only Protestant Dissenters but Catholics as well. Adding fuel to this suspicion was the company Charles was keeping himself, who were well-known Catholics. All this, as Tim Harris wrote, "inevitably created the impression that popery was on the increase."<sup>97</sup>

Halifax joined the opposition, the Country party, in their efforts to put a check on the government's Catholic leanings. He lent his support to the Test Act of 1673, which effectively barred Catholics from civil and military service.<sup>98</sup> Early in 1674, during a discussion in the Lords about how best to secure the Protestant religion, Halifax moved that all Catholic recusants should be disarmed. Later on, he along with another peer further proposed that royal family members who married Catholics should be excluded from the line of succession. This, however, was not intended to apply to James, even though the Duke's conversion to the Catholic faith was known to Halifax by then.<sup>99</sup> Halifax was nonetheless alarmed by James' conversion and harboured visible distrust in the Duke. During a Lords debate on Charles' Declaration of Indulgence, he said that "if we could make good the eastern compliment, 'O king, live for ever,' he could trust the King with everything;

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<sup>97</sup> Harris, *Restoration*, pp. 72-74.

<sup>98</sup> Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 103-105.

<sup>99</sup> Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 111-112; Brown, Introduction to Part One, pp. 6-7.



but since that was so much a compliment that it could never become real, he could not be implicit in his confidence.”<sup>100</sup>

Halifax’s opposition to the government continued throughout the 1670s. His position eventually pitted him against the Lord Treasurer, Earl of Danby, who became the chief minister during much of that decade. It was true that Danby and Halifax had a personal rivalry of sorts, yet, as Brown noted, the latter would have had reason to oppose Danby’s government on the grounds that he was seemingly attempting to govern in a style that tended to encourage absolutist tendencies.<sup>101</sup> In a notable instance of distrust in Danby’s government, Halifax joined with the opposition voices and vehemently opposed his attempt in 1675 to introduce a test bill, which required all office holders and members of Parliament to make an oath never to undertake measures against the government or to alter it in either Church or state.<sup>102</sup> By then, Charles had tolerated enough of Halifax’s dissent and he was shortly dismissed from the Privy Council.<sup>103</sup>

The opposition’s assaults on Danby’s government made no substantial headways. The two remained in deadlock until 1678, when the fictitious revelations of a Catholic plot provided the opposition the means to bring down Danby. However, this came at the cost of immediately ushering in the infamous Exclusion Crisis. Halifax’s career took a drastic turn during the course of the Crisis. Having fashioned himself as an ardent critic of Danby’s

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<sup>100</sup> Burnet, *History*, vol. 1, p. 266.

<sup>101</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part One, p. 7.

<sup>102</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part One, p. 7; Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, pp. 117-121.

<sup>103</sup> Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, pp. 122-123.

government in the 1670s, he would paradoxically become deeply entrenched in Charles' government after the Treasurer's fall.

### **Chapter 3 – The Exclusion Crisis**

Danby and his government ultimately would not survive the panic-rife atmosphere of the Popish Plot period. The opposition would exploit the Plot in order to bring about the chief minister's downfall. Anxiety about Catholicism would not end with Danby though. The nation next turn its attentions to Charles' Catholic brother and heir presumptive to the throne. Many feared that a Catholic succession would inevitably bring about the ruin of Protestant England. In response to these fears, the solution of excluding him from the line of succession would be vigorously pursued by members of a political group known as the Whigs. The start of this campaign for James' exclusion effectively marked the beginning of the Exclusion Crisis.

Halifax would find himself embroiled in this Crisis against the Whigs. This chapter discusses his rejection of Exclusion. It will contrast Halifax's approach with that of the Whigs to the problem of a Catholic successor. As will be seen, Halifax's approach was based more upon a consideration of the more immediate circumstances, whereas the Whig approach was based upon a conviction of their foresight. Halifax's rejection of the Whig's approach in favour of a more pragmatic one was entirely consistent with his aphorisms, which show his notable scepticism of human foresight. Halifax believed that one's foresight had its limits, and it was folly to rely too heavily on this flawed faculty. Aside from the inherent flaws of Exclusion, it will also be seen that Halifax rejected it in order to check Whig ambitions to become kingmakers. His concern about these ambitions was also consistent with his aphorisms. In his short pieces, Halifax was not only sceptical about the capabilities of the

human mind, but he believed that human self-interest, if left unchecked, would have undesirable consequences for existing political arrangements.

### The fall of Danby and the advent of a succession crisis

Danby's fall came in the advent of the infamous Popish Plot. The Plot, "revealed" principally by one Titus Oates in 1678, alleged that there existed a Catholic plot to assassinate the King and rise up against English Protestants.<sup>104</sup> The Plot was entirely fictitious, but there were certain developments that gave it an appearance of credibility. Edward Coleman, former secretary of James, was among those implicated in the Plot by Oates. His house was subsequently searched and among the papers found were incriminating letters dating from the mid-1670s pertaining to the advancement of the Catholic cause in England.<sup>105</sup> Later in the year, Sir Edmund Godfrey, the JP who previously received Oates' depositions, was found dead under suspicious circumstances. It was presumed by many that he had been murdered by Catholics to prevent vital information about the Plot from being exposed. To many, it seemed that Oates' revelations did have credibility. Even some of Charles' top advisors were initially prone to believing this.<sup>106</sup>

The Plot generated a heightened sense of anti-Catholic paranoia. The opposition in Parliament exploited this against Danby's government, particularly attacking its keeping up

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<sup>104</sup> Miller, *Popery and Politics*, pp. 155-156; Harris, *Restoration*, p. 137.

<sup>105</sup> Harris, *Restoration*, p. 137; Haley, *Shaftesbury*, pp. 455-456.

<sup>106</sup> Haley, *Shaftesbury*, pp. 456-459.

of the standing army.<sup>107</sup> The catalyst for the minister's downfall, however, came in the form of Ralph Montagu. Montagu was recalled unceremoniously from his ambassadorship in Paris, and when he tried to seek compensation from Danby, the chief minister refused.<sup>108</sup> Montagu's response to this rejection was to have disastrous consequences for Danby. The former ambassador had in his possession damaging letters showing that Danby had been involved in negotiations with France for subsidies earlier in 1678. These negotiations also took place at a time when the government was asking parliamentary grants to prepare a war against France. Acting in concert with members of the opposition and the French, Montagu exposed these letters in Parliament.<sup>109</sup> In the debacle that ensued, Danby was accused of association with Popery and attempting to introduce arbitrary government.<sup>110</sup> At a time when anti-Catholic sentiments reached its height, Montagu's evidence provided sufficient material to bring down and impeach the minister. Despite Charles' efforts to save his servant, the opposition was successful in effecting Danby's fall. The articles of impeachment were voted in December 1678, and in April the following year he was sent to the Tower, where he languished until 1684.<sup>111</sup>

After Danby's fall, Charles decided to reconstitute his Privy Council. In choosing his new Council, he included members of the opposition in the hopes of dividing them.<sup>112</sup> Charles included Halifax in this new Council, though with great reluctance and only under

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<sup>107</sup> Miller, *Popery and Politics*, pp. 171-172.

<sup>108</sup> Haley, *Shaftesbury*, p. 487.

<sup>109</sup> Jones, *Charles II*, p. 133; Hutton, *Charles the Second*, pp. 364-365.

<sup>110</sup> Miller, *Popery and Politics*, p. 172.

<sup>111</sup> Jones, *Charles II*, p. 133. Hutton, *Charles the Second*, pp. 369-370.

<sup>112</sup> Jones, *Charles II*, pp. 143-144; Hutton, *Charles the Second*, pp. 371-372.

strenuous arguments from his other advisors.<sup>113</sup> Halifax played his part in Danby's downfall as a member of the opposition. He was among those who admitted that they would exploit the Popish Plot in order to break up the political alliance between Danby and James, and also to deprive Charles of the parliamentary grants needed to maintain his standing army.<sup>114</sup> In taking such a course, Halifax, as mentioned before, was possibly fearful that Danby's continued prominence would eventually lead to the introduction of a more absolutist government. Brown further pointed out that the eventual discovery of Danby's dealings with France behind the nation's back would have justified the Plot's exploitation from Halifax's point of view.<sup>115</sup> Regardless of the motivations for his actions, Halifax would acquire what Brown called, "a responsible ministerial perspective" after being admitted into this Privy Council. As a result, his political priorities shifted.<sup>116</sup> This was much to Charles' advantage, for no sooner had one problem passed than another came into view.

With Danby gone, the spotlight eventually turned to the Duke of York. The heightened fears over Popery remained and there was a belief that James, being a Catholic heir to the throne, was an encouragement to any Catholic plot which sought the King's assassination.<sup>117</sup> This line of interpretation was formally endorsed by the Commons on 27 April 1679.<sup>118</sup> More significantly, James himself became implicated in Coleman's incriminating letters, thereby directly linking the royal Duke to the Popish Plot conspiracy.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 146-149.

<sup>114</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part One, p. 8.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>117</sup> Haley, *Shaftesbury*, p. 456.

<sup>118</sup> Jones, *Charles II*, p. 145.

<sup>119</sup> Hutton, *Charles the Second*, p. 361; Haley, *Shaftesbury*, p. 470; Miller, *Popery and Politics*, p. 173.

National anxiety over a Catholic succession now came into limelight. Concern over James' Catholic religion was not new, and it was an issue that cropped up even before 1679.<sup>120</sup> However, the Popish Plot further fuelled anxieties about this and his likely succession to the throne. Many feared that the ruin of Protestant England would inevitably follow the Duke's crowning. As Harris has shown clearly, those who feared the prospect of James' reign drew from examples in history as well as the present. The English were for instance reminded of the atrocities committed upon Protestants during Catholic Mary I's reign.<sup>121</sup> Other examples of Catholic cruelty were also drawn from other events in history, such as during the Thirty Years War.<sup>122</sup> Then there were some who looked to absolutist France as another indicator of what England would look like under a Catholic monarch. Under such a monarch, it was feared that England would be ruled in an arbitrary style similar to Louis XIV's France.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, the perceived association between Popery and arbitrary government had become cemented by the time of the Popish Plot.<sup>124</sup> In the eyes of many, James' succession would bring both to England.

A new political force would emerge with the aim of preventing this grim future by a radical remedy. The Whigs, as they were later known, looked to many solutions, but many would choose to advocate the preventive measure of excluding James from the line of succession. The Whigs were opposed by those who were later known as the Tories, who rejected Exclusion as a solution to the problem of a Catholic successor. This political conflict

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<sup>120</sup> Miller, *Popery and Politics*, pp. 127-131, 134.

<sup>121</sup> Harris, *Restoration*, p. 150.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>124</sup> Miller, *Popery and Politics*, pp. 181-180.

over James' succession became a central issue over the years 1679 to 1681. This period of heated antagonisms over the succession eventually became known as the Exclusion Crisis.<sup>125</sup> Three Exclusion Parliaments would sit during this period. Each prepared an Exclusion Bill to effectively sever James from the line of succession. The first and third Exclusion Bills never progressed past the Commons due to dissolutions. The second Bill in 1680 passed the Commons but was immediately voted out by the Upper House. As will be shown below, Halifax himself played a notable role in opposing Exclusion.

### Halifax's general position on Exclusion

Halifax served as Privy Councillor throughout this Crisis. In this capacity, he advised Charles as the government sought to diffuse the excited national climate and fend off attempts to alter the royal succession. He was particularly active in this role during the first year of the Crisis when he formed a short-lived "Triumvirate" with the Earls Sunderland and Essex.<sup>126</sup> However, Halifax's most prominent piece of service to Charles would be his open opposition to the second Exclusion Bill of 1680. Halifax's opposition to Exclusion can be considered the key characteristic of his domestic politics at this time. His position was in line with that of the Tories insofar as he rejected it as a viable solution to the nation's fears.

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<sup>125</sup> There is, however, debate among various scholars about how the Exclusion Crisis should be understood. See, Harris, *Restoration*, pp. 138-139.

<sup>126</sup> Foxcroft gives a detailed account of Halifax's career in relation to the Triumvirate. Kenyon also offers a summary of the Triumvirate's activities. See, Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, pp. 150-192; Kenyon, *Sunderland*, pp. 27-32.



Halifax was not, however, oblivious to the prevailing concerns at the time. He was aware of and conformed to the heightened anxieties caused by the Popish Plot. In investigating the Plot in April 1679, Halifax was described as being among those “eminent in pleading for indulgence to tender-conscienced Protestants, and severity against Papists.”<sup>127</sup> Outwardly, Halifax acquiesced fully in the truth of the Plot, as he wrote to his brother in July that year, “I cannot blame you for being a little stirr’d to see men’s unbelief so ill placed as to think there is no plott here.”<sup>128</sup> However, at a time when rejecting the Plot’s veracity was considered anathema, it is suggestive that Halifax would entertain even the possibility of its being a fabrication.<sup>129</sup> As Halifax told his fellow colleague in government, Sir William Temple, “the plot must be handled as if it were true, whether it were so or no, in those points that were so generally believed by city or country as well as both houses”.<sup>130</sup> This would suggest that Halifax had his doubts about the truth of the Plot but believed it to be in the government’s best interest to conform to the prevailing anxieties.<sup>131</sup>

Despite his possible scepticism of the Plot’s veracity, Halifax did share the common apprehension of having a Catholic successor in James. As mentioned above, his distrust of James was already visible by 1673, and in 1680 he acknowledged that the royal Duke for being a Catholic must “sufferr [sic]”.<sup>132</sup> But on the issue of the succession he disagreed with

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<sup>127</sup> Algernon Sidney to Henry Savile, 28 April 1679, in *Letters of The Honourable Algernon Sydney, To the Honourable Henry Savile, Ambassador in France*, ed. [Unnamed] (London: Printed for R. Dodsley, at Tully’s Head in Pall mall, 1742), pp. 42-43.

<sup>128</sup> Halifax to Henry Savile, 7/17 July 1679, in *Savile Correspondence*, p. 107.

<sup>129</sup> Harris, *Popery and Politics*, pp. 173-174.

<sup>130</sup> Sir William Temple, *The Works of Sir William Temple, Bart.*, vol. 2, (London: Printed for J. Brotherton, 1770), p. 506.

<sup>131</sup> A similar point was also made by Brown. See, Brown, Introduction to Part One, p. 9.

<sup>132</sup> “Report of Lords’ Debate, 15 November 1680, said to be by Lord Huntingdon,” in “The House of Lords in the Parliament of 1680,” by E. S. De Beer, *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* vol. 20 (1943): p. 35.

the Exclusionists. Whereas the Exclusionists wished to repudiate entirely the rightful inheritance of the heir presumptive, Halifax advocated for less radical solutions, such as placing legal limitations on the powers of a future Catholic monarch.<sup>133</sup> Halifax's hostile stance to Exclusion could be seen early on in the Crisis. After the prospect of disinheriting James became a point of parliamentary discussion in April 1679, Halifax strongly opposed it. As Bishop Burnet recalled, "both Tillotson and I, who thought we had some interest in lord Halifax, took great pains on him, to divert him from opposing it [Exclusion] so furiously as he did." As Burnet further wrote, Halifax was to become "the champion against the exclusion."<sup>134</sup>

Halifax's rejection of Exclusion was characteristic in two ways in the context of his aphorisms. It was characteristic in the sense that it aligned with his scepticism of human foresight; and it was characteristic given his views of human nature. The former will be elaborated first. The objections to Exclusion did not devolve into a single category. There were many Tories who, out of constitutional scruple or their loyalty to the Crown, were abhorrent of the mere notion of disinheriting James from the line of succession.<sup>135</sup> There were others still who objected to it on the more practical grounds that it would lead to another civil war.<sup>136</sup> Halifax was in the latter category. He did not attack Exclusion on principle, and he would even concede that Parliament "rather has a power yn nott" to disinherit James.<sup>137</sup> But he was sceptical about the appropriateness of the measure under

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<sup>133</sup> Burnet, *History*, vol. 1, p. 303.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305.

<sup>135</sup> Harris, *Restoration*, pp. 225-226.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 238-239.

<sup>137</sup> This is how this study interpreted the fragmentary passage. "Report of Lords' Debate," p. 35. This reading is supported by scholars such as Brown and Kenyon. See, Brown, Introduction to Part One, pp. 11-12; Kenyon, Introduction to *Halifax: Complete Works*, p. 14.

the current circumstances. He thought it was too strong a remedy. As he wrote to his political colleague Sir Thomas Thynne in October 1680, “if there is any possibility of making ourselves safe by lower expedients, I had rather use them, than venture upon so strong a remedy, as the disinheriting the next heir of the Crown.”<sup>138</sup> Halifax saw inherent risks in such a radical measure. He alluded to Exclusion as a cure that was as harmful as the disease it was curing. In the same letter, he lamented to his friend about the precarious path the Exclusionists were leading the nation. “A fine world, and a happy prospect of things, when our remedies are little less to be feared than our disease”.<sup>139</sup>

As hinted above, Halifax did not oppose Exclusion on the grounds of legality. Rather, he rejected the Exclusionist viewpoint that the measure was necessary and expedient. This is an important distinction to make because the arguments for the necessity of Exclusion rested upon a strong claim about the future. It was characteristic of Halifax to reject such claims. His aphorisms showed a notable scepticism about the reliability of human foresight. He acknowledged that the human mind was limited in assessing a situation beyond what was more immediate. A comparative discussion of these contrasting viewpoints will provide greater context to Halifax’s rejection of Exclusion in this regard.

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<sup>138</sup> Halifax to Sir Thomas Thynne, 5 October 1680, printed in *Halifax: Complete Works*, p. 325.

<sup>139</sup> Halifax to Sir Thomas Thynne, 5 October 1680, in *ibid.*, p. 325.

### Whig claims about the future

The Exclusionists' claims about the future can be seen in the arguments they used to justify disinheriting James. These often gravitated towards the prediction that James' reign would almost inevitably result in the weakening or destruction of England's Protestant and constitutional foundations. In the first place, pamphleteer Charles Blount argued that a Catholic successor in England was bound to violate any promises to preserve the Protestant religion and to rule by law. "If ever a Popish Successor comes amongst you, let his promises of keeping your Religion and Laws, or of his Conversion, be never so plausible, credit 'em not; for if you do, you will infallibly be deceiv'd, and in time find them to be but like the Bait to a Mouse-trap." Rather, such a successor would seek to rule by a standing army without Parliament, and then "he and his Council will Levy his Arbitrary Taxes, and his Army shall gather them for him." Exclusion was seen as the most expedient solution to preventing this grim future that would follow a Catholic successor. As Blount himself reasoned, "you may much easier prevent the Distemper at first, than remedy it when it has once got a Head".<sup>140</sup> Another pamphleteer similarly considered it as certain that Popery and arbitrary government would follow in the wake of a Catholic successor. As the author rhetorically asked their readers, "will such a Successor, think you, have so much Love for another Religion as his own, or for those of another Profession (whom by his Perswation he is obliged to esteem all *damned Hereticks*) as for those of his own". It was logical that such a successor would seek to extirpate those "Hereticks". As the author continued, "will it not naturally follow, that he will advance the one and discountenance and depress the

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<sup>140</sup> [Charles Blount], *An Appeal from the Country to the City, For the Preservation of His Majesties Person, Liberty, Property, and the Protestant Religion* (London, 1679), pp. 4-5.

other.”<sup>141</sup> The main assumption here was that once a Catholic successor sat on the throne, they would invariably bring disaster to Protestant England. This assumption was digested and taken for granted in other pamphlets. For instance, Thomas Hunt wrote that once James succeeded to the throne, “he must be a Slave to one part of the People, to Destroy the other.”<sup>142</sup> In another pamphlet, W. G. Gent argued that such a radical solution as Exclusion was justified whenever “there can be no safety, but general Ruin and Destruction expected from the next Successor.”<sup>143</sup> As can be seen here, all these Exclusionist pamphlets make a claim about the future. This claim was that James’ reign would almost certainly undermine or destroy the Protestant and constitutional foundations of England.

This belief can be seen within the debates in Parliament too. The Exclusionists’ expression of this can be vividly seen during the second Exclusion Parliament in 1680. During a debate on 11 November, an objection to Exclusion was made on the grounds that it amounted to a punishment of the Duke for nothing more than “his being perverted to Popery from the Protestant Religion.”<sup>144</sup> To this objection, the Exclusionists insisted that the measure was to prevent the likely ruin that James would bring once he became king. Sir William Jones argued that “this Bill is not a punishment without hearing the Duke... We do not punish the Duke as a Criminal, but we are preventing the Evil that is likely to befall us

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<sup>141</sup> *A Most Serious Expostulation with several of my Fellow-Citizens in reference to their standing so high for the D. Y’s Interest at this Juncture of Time* (1680), p. 2.

<sup>142</sup> [Thomas Hunt], *The Great and Weighty Considerations, Relating to the Duke of York, or, Successor of the Crown. Offered to the King, and both Houses of Parliament: Considered* (London, 1680), p. 20.

<sup>143</sup> W. G. Gent, *The Case of Succession to the Crown of England Stated, In a Letter to a Member of the Honorable House of Commons* (1679), p. 14.

<sup>144</sup> Sir Leoline Jenkins’ speech 11 November 1680 in Anchitell Grey, *Debates of the House of Commons, From the Year 1667 to the Year 1694. Collected by the Honble Anchitell Grey, Esq*, ed. [Unnamed], vol. 7, (London: Printed for T. Becket and P. A. De Hondt in the Strand, 1769), p. 447.

from that Religion he professes.”<sup>145</sup> Sir Francis Winnington argued in stronger terms that “if an ancient family might possibly be ruined by the eldest son, it is not unjust to disinherit him. The Parliament does see, that, if a Popish Prince comes to the Crown, the Kingdom will be ruined”.<sup>146</sup> Others, such as John Trenchard believed that Exclusion was not an act of injustice against the Duke because of the gravity of the implications should he succeed. “There is a great difference betwixt putting a man barely out of his Right, and where there is danger that he will involve the Nation in misery.”<sup>147</sup> In all these examples, Exclusion was not seen as unjust or unjustified; it was justified as simply a preventative for the “Evil that is likely to befall us.” But as a preventative, it was premised upon the prediction that James would likely bring ruin to Protestant England if he came to the throne.

To be sure, alternative solutions such as limiting the powers of a Catholic monarch also rested on this assumption of a future threat from James. Indeed, the explicit purpose of such limitations was “that he [a Catholic successor] may be disabled to do any harm.”<sup>148</sup> However, the pursuit for Exclusion was premised on a stronger claim of the future, and hence relied more on the foresight of the human mind. This was because the Exclusionists insisted on the additional claim that James would ultimately be able to shake off any alternative restrictions once he succeeded. Their prediction was not only that James would bring ruin should he succeed; but that as long as he succeeded, nothing could be done to restrain him from bringing this ruin. This was true of placing legal limitations on James’ royal

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<sup>145</sup> Sir William Jones’ speech 11 November 1680 in *ibid.*, p. 451.

<sup>146</sup> Sir Francis Winnington’s speech 11 November 1680 in *ibid.*, pp. 453-454.

<sup>147</sup> John Trenchard’s speech 11 November 1680 in *ibid.*, p. 458.

<sup>148</sup> Chancellor’s speech, 30 April 1679, in *Journals of the House of Commons*, vol. 9, (Re-printed by Order of the House of Commons, 1803), pp. 607.

powers. As Blount argued, “if you think to bind and fetter him by Laws, that will be no better than the wise men of *Gotham*’s hedging in the Cuckow; for when he (as all other Popish Kings do) governs by an Army, what will all your Laws signifie.”<sup>149</sup> This rhetoric was mirrored during the debates in the House of Commons. During the first Exclusion Parliament in 1679, Charles had made himself clear on 30 April that he would support the idea of limitations. Such a scheme would deprive a Catholic monarch powers over the established church and substantially increase the powers of Parliament at the same time.<sup>150</sup> These proposals were closely in line with what Halifax, among other Counsellors, was recommending at the time.<sup>151</sup> Charles’ proposals were ultimately rejected. The Exclusionists distrusted the sincerity of the King.<sup>152</sup> But aside from this distrust, they also believed that James’ Catholic ambitions and power would not be bound by these laws. As Richard Hampden argued on 11 May, “for us to go about to tie a Popish Successor with Laws for preservation of the Protestant Religion, is binding *Sampson* with withes; he will break them when he is awake.”<sup>153</sup> John Swynfin argued similarly. “Consider what a new-converted King will do. He will throw away all his Power and Treasure into the Pope’s Arms, who governs him; and can you think that those Laws will do you any good against a Popish Successor, when he comes to the Crown?”<sup>154</sup> As can be seen here, there was an impression among the Exclusionists that it was impossible to restrain James by legal limitations once he became king.

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<sup>149</sup> [Blount], *Appeal from the Country to the City*, p. 4.

<sup>150</sup> Chancellor’s speech, 30 April 1679, in *Journals of the House of Commons*, vol. 9, pp. 607-608.

<sup>151</sup> Burnet, *History*, vol. 1, p. 303. Scholars such as Kenyon have attributed Charles’ proposals to Halifax himself. See Kenyon, *Sunderland*, p. 26.

<sup>152</sup> Haley, *Shaftesbury*, pp. 517-518.

<sup>153</sup> Mr. Hampden’s speech, 11 May 1679, in Grey, *Debates*, vol. 7, p. 243.

<sup>154</sup> Mr. Swynfin’s speech, 11 May 1679, in *ibid.*, p. 249.

Nor were these limitations the only alternative remedy proposed. During the ill-fated Oxford Parliament of March 1681, the expedient of establishing a regency during James' reign was proposed. This remedy would allow James to succeed as King in name only while a regent governed in his stead.<sup>155</sup> Again, this expedient was rejected in favour of Exclusion. One of the main objections to a regency was that it was impossible to separate royal power from James once he became King. Sir William Pulteney argued, for instance, that "our Law will not endure it to divide the Person of the King from the Power."<sup>156</sup> The belief was that as long as James held the title of King, he could always defy his restrictions or restore himself back to practical power. As Jones argued, "but if you do not exclude the Duke's title by Law, the Duke is King still, and then learned Lawyers will tell you, that, by the 1st Hen. VII, all incapacity is done away by his being King."<sup>157</sup> Others such as Sir Nicholas Carew feared that James as King would simply defy his restrictions under a regency, which might render Protestant self-defence traitorous. "I would be satisfied, if the Duke will not submit to that, whether those who fight against him are not Traytors to the Law?"<sup>158</sup> Winnington argued that a regency to separate James' royal power was a legal contradiction that would void the restrictions placed upon him. As he said, "Acts of Parliament against Common-sense are void in themselves; to make a man King, and not suffer him to exercise kingly power, is a contradiction." For this reason, Winnington remained firm on his support for Exclusion. "If the Duke comes to the Crown a Papist, he brings *merum Imperium* along with him", and a regency would not restrain James' power in any way. As he continued, "we have no security

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<sup>155</sup> Sir John Ernly's speech, 26 March 1681, in Anchitell Grey, *Debates of the House of Commons, From the Year 1667 to the Year 1694. Collected by the Honble Anchitell Grey, Esq*, ed. [Unnamed], vol. 8, (London: Printed for T. Becket and P. A. De Hondt in the Strand, 1769), p. 315.

<sup>156</sup> Sir William Pulteney's speech, 26 March 1681, in *ibid.*, p. 316.

<sup>157</sup> Sir William Jones' speech, 26 March 1681, in *ibid.*, p. 321.

<sup>158</sup> Sir Nicholas Carew's speech, 26 March 1681, in *ibid.*, pp. 315-316.



in Law by this Expedient. You take away no authority from the Duke, should he be King. Therefore I hope the Bill of Exclusion will pass".<sup>159</sup> From the Exclusionist perspective, James' reign would likely bring disaster to Protestant England and no alternative restrictions could prevent this once he was on the throne. This meant that preventing James' succession was the strongest available solution for the Exclusionists. In this sense, the push for Exclusion was premised upon a stronger claim about the future than the advocacy for limitations or a regency. The latter category allowed for the possibility of restraining a Catholic monarch once on the throne, whilst the former went further and rejected this possibility.

### Halifax's scepticism of claims about the future

Halifax was not persuaded by the arguments about the supposed necessity of Exclusion. He stood by his opposition to it throughout the Crisis. His crowning moment against Exclusion was when it was brought up to the House of Lords on 15 November 1680. From there, ensued a fierce debate in the House over the Bill, with Halifax arguing against it and Shaftesbury and other Exclusionist lords for it. During this debate, Halifax argued for a more pragmatic assessment of the Bill's merits. He made clear that disinheriting James from the succession was neither expedient nor necessary. From a fragmented report of this debate, Halifax invoked the dreaded spectre of another civil war. He argued that Exclusion would be disputed by James himself and that the Duke had at his disposal a considerable degree of support from Scotland and Ireland.<sup>160</sup> This corroborates another account given in the *Life of James the Second*. According to this account, Halifax pointed out the imprudence

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<sup>159</sup> Sir Francis Winnington's speech, 26 March 1681, in *ibid.*, pp. 325-326.

<sup>160</sup> "Report of Lords' Debate," p. 35.

of declaring “the Duke an enemy of the State, who was actually at the head of a powerfull Nation, where there was an Army too; that in Ireland his power was no less considerable where there was 10, or 15 Papists for one Protestant, that he had great interest in the Fleet and credit with the English Troops.”<sup>161</sup> Moreover, Halifax believed that Exclusion was not the only solution. To begin with, Parliament could simply refuse James any revenue and then “hee cannot doe much hurt”.<sup>162</sup> Halifax expressed his confidence that an appropriate expedient to deal with a Catholic successor could be drawn up and gave his own assurances for it. Hence a few days later, George Vernon, a Whig MP, mentioned that “I heard he [Halifax] should say, ‘That if the Lords would reject the Bill, he would engage, on his Honour, to bring in such a Proposition as would please the Parliament.’” Such reassurances did not convince Vernon, who continued that “I would rather have his head, than any Popish Lord's in the *Tower*.”<sup>163</sup> Nonetheless this sheds light on Halifax’ point of view. To him, Exclusion was neither practical under the current circumstances nor was it absolutely necessary, as alternatives could still be devised.

The House debate over the second Exclusion Bill was tense and lasted for much of the day. According to a second-hand anecdote, there was a point at which it seemed as though swords would be drawn. If violence were to break out, Halifax was to be a prime

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<sup>161</sup> [John Caryll and William Dicconson], *The Life of James the Second, King of England, &c. collected out of memoirs writ of his own hand. Together with the King's advice to his son, and His Majesty's will. Published from the original Stuart manuscripts in Carlton-House, by the Rev. J. S. Clarke*, vol. 1, (London: Printed for Longman, 1816), p. 621. Edward Gregg has gone in depth about the authorship and the reliability of this work. From his own researches, Gregg’s conclusion was that since James II’s original papers were destroyed in the eighteenth century, the *Life of King James* as published by J. S. Clarke “is our best remaining authority.” See, Edward Gregg, “New Light on the Authorship of the Life of James II,” *The English Historical Review* vol. 108, no. 429 (1993): pp. 961-962.

<sup>162</sup> “Report of Lords’ Debate,” p. 35.

<sup>163</sup> Mr. Vernon’s speech, 17 November 1680, in Grey, *Debates*, vol. 8, p. 22.

target. Accordingly, one of the lords present “got as near to the marquis of Halifax as he could, being resolved to make sure of him, in case any violence had been offered”. Some other Exclusionists present were of a similar mind.<sup>164</sup> Fortunately, the debate ended without the clashing of swords. By appearance, the House was swayed by Halifax’s oratory as the Bill was thrown out by a vote of 63 to 30 on the first reading. The votes, however, were largely predetermined by the strong royalist composition within it. As such, the Bill would likely not have passed with or without Halifax’s intervention.<sup>165</sup> Nonetheless, contemporary opinion credited him with the defeat of the Bill that day and his efforts did probably lead to its speedy rejection.<sup>166</sup>

It was characteristic of Halifax that he would be unconvinced by the supposed merits of Exclusion. From his aphorisms, it can be seen that he was an empiricist at heart. His thoughts about action and conduct indicated his belief that human aspirations should be tempered by considerations of the present circumstances. As he reflected in one aphorism, “men apply that thought to compass this or that thing, and are very able in the means to the end, without considering whether the end is worth making up of the means.”<sup>167</sup> In another aphorism, Halifax similarly wrote, “When a designe is once entertained, the mind is tempted to carry it on with skill, and it gathering strength by continuance, men have not time to

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<sup>164</sup> Halifax was an Earl at the time, but this anecdote was given retrospectively by the Earl of Dartmouth. See Gilbert Burnet, *Bishop Burnet’s History of His Own Time: With the Suppressed Passages of the First Volume and Notes by the Earls of Dartmouth and Hardwicke and Speaker Onslow, Hitherto Unpublished*, vol. 1, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1823), p. 35, note “r”. Foxcroft reproduces this anecdote. See, Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 247-248.

<sup>165</sup> Glassey, “Shaftesbury and the Exclusion Crisis,” pp. 224-225; E. S. De Beer, “The House of Lords in the Parliament of 1680,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* vol. 20 (1943): p. 29.

<sup>166</sup> Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, p. 248; De Beer, “The House of Lords,” p. 30.

<sup>167</sup> Halifax, “Miscellanys,” pp. 81-82: 27-2.

consider that it would be more adviseable to let it quite alone.”<sup>168</sup> As suggested here, Halifax’s aphorisms encouraged a mentality of practical doubt in one’s goals. Rather than doggedly pursuing them, people should constantly doubt the efficacy of their aspirations based on considerations of practical reality. This empirical attitude lines up with his rejection of Exclusion. Halifax did not reject Exclusion as a solution, but he emphasised James’ defensible claim to the Crown and the support he could gather in defending that claim; should Exclusion pass, James had the ability to fight for his right with armed support. From this assessment of the political circumstances, Exclusion was still a remedy to the threat of a future Catholic successor, but it came at the cost of another civil war mere decades after a previous one. This was likely what Halifax meant when he wrote to Thynne in October 1680 describing the disinheriting of James as “so strong a remedy”.

However, Halifax’s rejection of Exclusion aligned with his aphorisms in a way that went beyond his empirical character. In so far as Exclusion was an extreme precaution based upon human foresight, he was consistent in rejecting it. As he wrote in one aphorism,

It would discourage a man from taking precautions, if hee considered how often they are disappointed. Precautions do as often invite a mischief as prevent it. A midling foresight is the best; to foresee at too great a distance, doth often recoyle upon us.<sup>169</sup>

Halifax here warned against a heavy reliance on human foresight because precautions borne from it can disappoint and produce additional problems. In other words, human foresight

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<sup>168</sup> Halifax, “Miscellaneous Maxims,” p. 343: 14-17.

<sup>169</sup> Halifax, “Miscellaneous Maxims,” pp. 411: 19-22.

was imperfect, and it was folly to place too much emphasis on it. Indeed, Halifax was a deep believer of the limitations of the human mind and part of this belief was his scepticism of the powers of human foresight. As he reflected in one aphorism, “there are some such very great Foreseers, that they grow into the Vanity of pretending to see where nothing is to be seen. He that will see at too great a distance, will sometimes mistake a bush for a Horse”.<sup>170</sup> Just as there were limits to how far the eye can clearly see, he believed that there were limits to how far the human mind can reliably predict. Halifax railed at those who refused to accept this and attempt to foreclose all future eventualities in their schemes and actions. “Men’s saying, they will leave nothing to Chance is impertinent, because it is impossible; Chance is a Goddess, and will not bee so used.”<sup>171</sup> To Halifax, human foresight had fundamental limitations. It could not predict all future eventualities with absolute certainty. Unsurprisingly, he discouraged a heavy reliance on it.

An attention to the more immediate circumstances provided a better guide for actions than the speculations of a fallible human foresight. As one aphorism said,

Chance and accidents are such gamesters in Politicks, that tho’ no wise statesmen will bett too much on their side, yet they will consider them so farr, as to bound their foresight, within a reasonable distance. The best schemes may not only be impertinent, but dangerous too, by being too remote.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, “Miscellaneous Thoughts and Reflections,” in *The Works of George Savile, Marquis of Halifax*, ed. Mark N. Brown, vol. 3, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 471: 35-38.

<sup>171</sup> Halifax, “Miscellanys,” pp. 326-327: 32-2.

<sup>172</sup> Halifax, “Micellanys,” p. 219: 6-10.

Halifax accepted that chance and unforeseen accidents must always be real factors in politics. It was wise to exercise some foresight to mitigate the risks of these factors. But an individual courts with folly when they obsess in refining their policies to the impossible point of encompassing all these accidents. As Halifax wrote within another aphorism, “the Prospect of a wise Man will be bounded. A Man may so overdo it in looking too far before him, that he may stumble the more for it.”<sup>173</sup> Here, Halifax explained more fully why it was dangerous to focus solely on human foresight and why “the best schemes” may be dangerous by being too remote. An obsession to speculate what was to come distracts the individual from the more immediate pitfalls that could stumble them. Predictions were always liable to being wrong, but current circumstances had real impacts. All these notions were consistent with Halifax’s rejection of Exclusion. The Whigs pushed for Exclusion based on arguments of necessity borne from strong claims about the future. Halifax, however, was unconvinced by such arguments; and rather than focusing on the remote and speculative threat of a future Catholic successor, he chose to prioritise on avoiding the more immediate danger of a civil war. More than simply empiricism, Halifax’s rejection of Exclusion was also consistent with his sceptical attitude with regards to human foresight.

### Checking Whig ambitions

Halifax’s opposition to Exclusion was also characteristic given his views of human nature. Aside from considering the inherent flaws of Exclusion, Halifax also rejected it to check Whig ambitions to become kingmakers. According to the fragments of his speech,

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<sup>173</sup> Halifax, “Miscellaneous Thoughts”, pp. 471-472: 38-2.

Halifax raised the concern that after Exclusion, there would be another bill to extend it further. As he argued, “the bill is not Calculated rightly if this doth passe another bill” and “is brought to Goe farther.”<sup>174</sup> Halifax here was implying his suspicion that some of the Whigs would seek to put another candidate on the throne after disinheriting James. This was not entirely ungrounded since some of the Whigs did desire to put Charles’ illegitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth on the throne.<sup>175</sup> Halifax suspected as much in Monmouth and also others such as the Duchess of Portsmouth for her own son. After the second Exclusion Bill was rejected, a subsequent proposal was brought up by Shaftesbury that the King divorce the Queen and remarry in order to produce a legitimate Protestant heir. This would amount to a less direct way of preventing James from succeeding the throne. On this proposal, Halifax alluded to the personal ambitions of those who were trying to deny James’ succession. It was reported by a French dispatch that,

“Lord Halifax, wishing to undo the effect of what had been proposed by Lord Shaftesbury about the exclusion of the Duke of York and the divorce, said that all these proposals were based only on private interest, and had no object but to bring about the success of unjust and chimerical pretensions. He said much else which could only apply to the Duke of Monmouth, and he added that there were some more secret and dangerous designs, and insinuated, without naming the Duchess of Portsmouth, that she had views for her son.”<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> “Report of Lords’ Debate,” p. 35.

<sup>175</sup> Harris, *Restoration*, p. 140; Haley, *Shaftesbury*, p. 592; Jones, *First Whigs*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>176</sup> Extract from Barillon’s despatch, 22 November/2 December 1679 [1680], printed in W. D. Christie, *A Life of Anthony Ashley Cooper, First Earl of Shaftesbury. 1667-1683*, vol. 2, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1871), p. 379. The year of the despatch was printed by Christie as 1679, but this is likely a misdate, since according to Christie this despatch was related to a committee that took place in 1680. Haley summarised the contents of the dispatch in the same context. See Christie, *Ashley Cooper*, vol. 2, pp. 378-379; Haley, *Shaftesbury*, p. 604.

Halifax expressed these suspicions more fully in an interview with the Dutch ambassador in December 1680. In the interview, Halifax wanted to warn William of Orange against trusting the Whigs and their push for Exclusion. By appearance, William stood to gain if James was excluded. His wife, Princess Mary, was next in line after James and there was a group among the Exclusionists who wanted her to succeed if Exclusion was successful. On the other hand, Monmouth and his supporters might also stand in the way of Mary's succession and by extension William's own elevation within the English hierarchy.<sup>177</sup> Therefore, the Prince had reason to be both anxious at and interested in the outcome of the Whigs' campaign.<sup>178</sup> Halifax warned that Exclusion would be of no benefit to the Prince. He argued that excluding James from the throne was only the first step that would set up a precedence for Parliament to pass further exclusions. All this, he suspected, would open the way for Monmouth to be placed on the throne.<sup>179</sup> In rejecting Exclusion, then, Halifax was also in part checking the Whigs' supposed ambitions to control the royal succession and become effective kingmakers.

Halifax's concern about the Exclusionists' ambitions was characteristic in the context of another notable theme in his aphorisms. This was his belief that people's actions were guided more by human nature than by reason. His aphorisms were rife with his views about this. Two scathing examples convey his general thoughts about the nature of humanity:

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<sup>177</sup> Haley, *Shaftesbury*, p. 592.

<sup>178</sup> William's anxiety over Exclusion could be seen when there were rumours in December 1680 that the King was willing to agree to Exclusion in exchange for parliamentary grants. See, *ibid.*, p. 615.

<sup>179</sup> M. de Leiden de Leeuwen to the Prince of Orange, 7/17 December 1680, printed in Groen van Prinsterer, *Archives ou Correspondance Inédite de la Maison d'Orange-Nassau : Recueil publié, avec Autorisation de S. M. le Roi*, series 2 tome 5, (Utrecht: Kemink et Fils., 1861), pp. 454-455. Foxcroft quoted this interview in the original French in her *Life and Letters*, but offered a detailed summary of it in her abridged *A Character of the Trimmer*. See Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol 1, pp. 264-265; Foxcroft, *Character of the Trimmer*, pp. 124-125.



A Centaure is no Monster, what ever hee is thought, there being few men whose bigger half is not *Beast*. Men are the Masters of the Mint, and so take upon them to coyne *Beast* into a Rationall Creature.

Men wonder to see others unreasonable, when the greater cause of wonder is to see that they are reasonable. The reasonable man is the monster to be stared at. It is the reasonable man is the dissenter, taking the church in its primitive signification.<sup>180</sup>

That Halifax believed human nature predominated in one's behaviour was a point that has been well addressed by Brown in his own discussion of Halifax's aphorisms. With supporting evidence from the collections, he argued that "it was evident to Halifax's observation of men's actual behaviour that they were guided more often by nature and passion than reason."<sup>181</sup> For Halifax, then, human nature was an inseparable and often dominating aspect of the human character.

More relevant to the current context with the Whigs, Halifax believed that in any conflict, humans, guided by their self-interest, had a tendency to take their victories to their extreme conclusion. As he wrote in one aphorism,

Men rise in their desires, and the first end on both sides going no further than self defense, grows to offend and to oppress, when they are under the temptation of having sufficient power for it.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Halifax, "Miscellaneous Maxims," p. 388: 26-30; Halifax, "Miscellanys," p. 241: 25-28.

<sup>181</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part Seven, p. 13.

<sup>182</sup> Halifax, "Miscellanys," p. 92: 9-11.

Because individuals often yield to their self-interest they are often apt to take self-defence beyond its proper boundaries. Once their own safety and dominance is secured, their desires grow which give them the temptation “to offend and to oppress” the fallen party. Halifax expressed a similar thought, though in a strictly political context in another aphorism. “It is the same in the clashing of all jurisdiction as it is between Prince and people; the prevailing party gets more and carries the victory beyond the thing contested for.”<sup>183</sup> Halifax’s low estimation of people’s ability to curb their self-interest in a political contest can be seen in his distrust of the Exclusionists’ ambitions.

Moreover, this human tendency to follow self-interest to its extreme conclusion also has implications in the realm of English politics. From Halifax’s point of view, the English government was a limited government in the sense that it depended upon a balance of power between it and its people.<sup>184</sup> Under this arrangement, it was not in the interest of the body politic to allow unbounded power to both parties. Doing so either leads to government tyranny or anarchy. It was necessary, in this political context, to check human self-interest so that neither side completely prevails over the other in their contests against each other. Quoting the above aphorism in full, Halifax wrote that,

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<sup>183</sup> Halifax, “Miscellanys,” p. 83: 4-6.

<sup>184</sup> George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, “Fundamentals,” in *The Works of George Savile, Marquis of Halifax*, ed. Mark N. Brown, vol. 2, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 138-139: 17-3; George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, “Political Thoughts and Reflections,” in *The Works of George Savile, Marquis of Halifax*, ed. Mark N. Brown, vol. 2, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 233: 6-9; George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, “Prerogative,” in *The Works of George Savile, Marquis of Halifax*, ed. Mark N. Brown, vol. 2, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 35: 18-23. For evidence that Halifax saw the English government in a similar light, see Halifax, “Character of the Trimmer,” pp. 194-195.

Men rise in their desires, and the first end on both sides going no further than self defense, grows to offend and to oppress, when they are under the temptation of having sufficient power for it. As the government is limited, wise men will wish, that the success of either side may be so too. And the mean is so nice, between defending our own Liberty, and taking away our adversaries', that there have been very few examples of it.<sup>185</sup>

For Halifax, it should be in the interest of "wise men" to "wish that the success of either side" in a political contest under a limited government be restrained. All this translates to the necessity of checking human nature in the political arena so that it did not disrupt the harmony of a political arrangement. Halifax's opposition to Exclusion partly from a suspicion of Whig ambitions to control the royal succession was consistent with this. It points to a concern to prevent human self-interest from fundamentally affecting the balance between Crown and Parliament.

### The aftermath of Halifax's opposition

Halifax paid a bitter price for his actions against Exclusion. He became the target of intense Whig hostility for the role he played in throwing out the 1680 Bill. The Commons addressed Charles to expel him from the Privy Council and he was branded a "Promoter of Popery, and an Enemy to the King and Kingdom."<sup>186</sup> Adding to this was the additional blow that Halifax felt many of his political allies had abandoned him after his open opposition to Exclusion. "I must only cast about for a new set of friends", as he wrote to his brother in

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<sup>185</sup> Halifax, "Miscellanys," p. 92: 9-15

<sup>186</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, vol. 9, pp. 660, 702.

December 1680, “for my old ones have been so very zealous for the publick that some of them thought it as meritorious to persecute me as others believed it excusable to desert me.”<sup>187</sup> Nonetheless, Halifax endured his situation with an outward stoicism. When he wrote to his brother about the possibility of further attacks from the Commons, Halifax wrote that “I have recourse still to my small philosophy, and have not only the comfort of innocence to support me, but the impossibility of avoiding any strokes of this kind without such indecencys... as I can never digest.”<sup>188</sup>

Endured Halifax did. After the dissolution of the Oxford Parliament in March 1681, the last of the Exclusion Parliaments, Charles would never summon another parliament for the short remainder of his lifetime. Despite all the seeming clamour for Exclusion, the Duke of York’s right to the throne remained unscathed. The Exclusionist Whigs, for all their hostility, were unwilling to fight another civil war for their cause, and Charles had stood firm on the matter of preserving the succession.<sup>189</sup> After the dissolution, the Whigs could do little to promote Exclusion outside the framework of a parliament. Thereafter, the fortunes of the Whigs would see a dramatic reversal. Charles’ government subsequently introduced a series of reactionary measures against their leadership and their bases of support. Halifax had survived an ordeal by the passing of the Exclusion Crisis. Still ranking among Charles’ Privy Councillors, he would play an active part in the government’s reactionary measures. In this political climate, Halifax’s conduct continued to resonate with the values of his aphorisms.

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<sup>187</sup> Halifax to Henry Savile, 13/23 December 1680, in *Savile Correspondence*, p. 171.

<sup>188</sup> Halifax to Henry Savile, 6/16 January 1680/81, in *Savile Correspondence*, p. 173.

<sup>189</sup> Miller, *Popery and Politics*, p. 170.

## **Chapter 4 – The Counterattack on the Whigs**

Charles' dissolution of the Oxford Parliament in March 1681 marked a new phase in the fortunes of the Whig interest. Soon after dissolving Parliament, the King's government went on to enact a series of measures to weaken the Whigs' political power. Halifax would participate in these policies against the Whigs. As will be shown, Halifax's actions came at a time when England required national stability in order to deal with a crisis situation abroad. However, Halifax seemed content with merely weakening the Whigs as opposed to effecting their political demise. His conduct showed that he was opened to a national reconciliation between the party and Crown. Considering these factors, this chapter suggests that Halifax's conduct against the Whigs at this time could be better described as attempts to diffuse Whig extremism rather than destroying the party as a whole. Furthermore, such conduct was entirely consistent with his aphorisms which were explicitly critical of extremist mentalities. It will be further shown that Halifax in his aphorisms believed such mentalities manifested itself specifically in political parties.

### **Government suppression of the Whigs**

Soon after dissolving the Oxford Parliament, Charles followed it up with a declaration explaining his reasons for the dissolution. In this declaration Charles explained the reasons as being due to the intransigence of the Whigs, thereby laying the chief blame on them.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Charles II, *His Majesties declaration to all his loving subjects, touching the causes & reasons that moved him to dissolve the two last Parliaments* (London: Printed by the Assigns of John Bill, Thomas Newcomb and Henry Hills, 1681), pp. 6-9.

Despite the trouble the recent Parliaments had caused him, Charles pledged to continue having frequent Parliaments as well as to rule according to the laws of the land and preserve England from Popery.<sup>191</sup> This declaration inspired numerous addresses of thanks throughout the nation. Though there is good reason to doubt the genuineness of these addresses, they nonetheless served as propaganda showing the supposed support the government enjoyed.<sup>192</sup> This public display of apparent support coincided with a sustained campaign to suppress the Whigs and their bases of support.

The government measures against the Whigs largely comprised of two aspects. The first of these was to undermine Whig influence at the local level. This was done by a widespread purge of local office holders who were known to be Whig sympathisers and replacing them with those who were for the government's interests or had defected from the Exclusionist cause.<sup>193</sup> In purging Whig influence at the local level, the government also targeted the municipal corporations directly. This was achieved by acquiring their corporation charters and issuing new ones that allowed the Crown to appoint their officers. The acquisition of these charters often involved the threat of *quo warranto* proceedings whereby the Crown challenged the corporation's right to exist. The City of London fought their *quo warranto* challenge unsuccessfully and numerous municipal corporations were induced to surrender their charters voluntarily under this threat. Through these purges, Whig influence within local government diminished significantly.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>192</sup> Harris, *Restoration*, pp. 266-278.

<sup>193</sup> Hutton, *Charles the Second*, pp. 405-406.

<sup>194</sup> Harris, *Restoration*, pp. 293-300.

The second aspect of these measures was an intensified persecution against Protestant Dissenters. Since the Exclusion Crisis, the Whigs were commonly associated with Protestant nonconformity. Indeed, a significant portion of Protestant Dissenters supported the exclusion of the Duke of York from the line of succession; while the Whigs for the most part supported the notion of religious toleration for them.<sup>195</sup> Furthermore, many of the Whigs themselves came from nonconformist backgrounds.<sup>196</sup> By 1681, the association between the Whigs and Dissenters was solidified in Tory propaganda and was encouraged by Charles himself.<sup>197</sup> A natural consequence of this was that the fortunes of the one depended upon the other, and when the government struck back at the Whigs after 1681 the Dissenters became an inevitable target. During this period of persecution, heavy fines were levied against nonconformity, which often led to imprisonment since many did not have the means to pay their fines. To add to this, many of those imprisoned during this period also perished in their cells.<sup>198</sup>

Halifax was an active member of the government machinery during this period. He enjoyed a brief period of respite in the country after the Oxford Parliament, but returned to London in May 1681 to resume his role as Privy Councillor.<sup>199</sup> In 1682 he was rewarded with a marquisate and thereafter served as Lord Privy Seal.<sup>200</sup> As a member of the current government, Halifax did not publicly repudiate its policies. In fact, as will be shown below,

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<sup>195</sup> Lacey, *Dissent*, p. 248.

<sup>196</sup> Harris, *Restoration*, p. 179; Tim Harris, *Politics Under the Later Stuarts: Party Conflict in a Divided Society 1660-1715* (London: Longman Group, 1993), p. 93.

<sup>197</sup> Harris, *Restoration*, pp. 239-245. Hutton, *Charles the Second*, p. 424.

<sup>198</sup> Harris, *Restoration*, pp. 301-302.

<sup>199</sup> Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, pp. 291-292, 294-298.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 360-361.

Halifax helped keep the government machinery moving. Even Foxcroft, who was generous in her interpretations whenever it came to the more unpleasant aspects of Halifax's career, had to admit to his active participation in some of these policies.<sup>201</sup>

### Diffusing Whig extremism at a time of foreign crisis

Halifax's actions against the Whigs came against the backdrop of a foreign crisis. The catalyst for this crisis was French aggression against the Low Countries. This began when Louis XIV pressed his claims on Luxembourg in the Spanish Netherlands in March 1681. By the end of the year, Louis had taken Strasbourg and was laying siege to Luxembourg.<sup>202</sup> Under England's 1680 defensive treaty with Spain, Charles would have been obligated to come to Spain's aid. Accordingly, the Spanish and the Dutch were pressuring Charles to help check French aggression.<sup>203</sup> The English nation, furthermore, was also predisposed to wanting to check French aggrandisement as well.<sup>204</sup> However, Charles had already guaranteed England's neutrality by a secret treaty with France, also concluded in March that year. Under this secret agreement, Charles pledged to not honour his obligations to the Spanish and it was also agreed that he would not call a parliament for such purposes. The Sun King on his side promised Charles subsidies over three years.<sup>205</sup> As a result of these foreign entanglements, Charles found himself in a dilemma whereby he was publicly obliged to aid Spain against France and secretly required not to do so.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 375-379.

<sup>202</sup> Hutton, *Charles the Second*, pp. 409-410.

<sup>203</sup> Foxcroft, *Life*, vol. 1, pp. 306-307; Hutton, *Charles the Second*, pp. 410-411; Brown, Introduction to Part One, p. 29.

<sup>204</sup> Harris, *Restoration*, pp. 164-166.

<sup>205</sup> Jones, *Charles II*, pp. 166-167; Hutton, *Charles the Second*, pp. 400-401.

<sup>206</sup> Hutton, *Charles the Second*, 410.



Under such circumstances, Charles' seemingly troubled domestic situation offered a smoke screen for inaction. If England was to assist the Spanish and the Dutch, a parliament would need to be summoned to obtain the necessary supplies for the purpose. However, one obvious obstacle stood in the way. This was the rift between the Crown and the Whigs. After the divisive experiences of the previous Exclusion Parliaments, many contemporaries came to believe that so long as the rift continued, a harmonious parliament was unlikely to happen much less the actual summoning of one. Hence when France took Strasbourg in October 1681, Halifax's trusted friend, Sir John Reresby, recorded that "our King could afford them [the Dutch and Spanish] noe helpe without a Parlament to supply him with mony, which it was feared the present jealousies would either prevent, or, if they gave him mony, would not trust him with the disposal of it."<sup>207</sup> Charles himself used this prevailing climate to his advantage when William took it upon himself to convince the King to take action. During a visit to England back in July, William insisted that an understanding be reached between the King and the Whigs in order to deal with the foreign situation. Charles for his part emphasised to the Prince the delicacy of his present domestic situation. He expressed his concerns that the Exclusionists would continue in their demands if a parliament was called.<sup>208</sup> The situation had not changed within Court by October as the Earl of Longford noted that Charles continued to blame his current circumstances on the "humour of the people being at present so factious."<sup>209</sup> To Charles' advantage, the

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<sup>207</sup> Sir John Reresby, *Memoirs of Sir John Reresby: The Complete Text and a Selection from his Letters*, preface and notes by Mary K. Getter and W. A. Speck, ed. Andrew Browning (London: Royal Historical Society, 1991), p. 233.

<sup>208</sup> *The Life of King James*, vol. 1, pp. 691-692; Jones, *First Whigs*, pp. 194-196.

<sup>209</sup> Earl of Longford to Ormonde, 25 October 1681, in Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Marquess of Ormonde. K. P. preserved at Kilkenny castle*, New Series vol. 6, (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1911), p. 208.

perception of Whig extremism was providing him pretext for foreign inaction, thereby helping him keep his agreement with Louis.

Halifax, for his part, advocated checking French aggression. At this critical juncture, he was sympathetic to the foreign interests of the Dutch and Spanish, particularly the former. In June 1681, English diplomat Henry Sidney reported to William that Halifax was among those who desired the Prince and Charles to come to an understanding and that Halifax had made “great professions of his being entirely in your interest, and said, you were the only foundation one could build upon.”<sup>210</sup> Halifax did not know that Charles had guaranteed England’s neutrality to Louis, so he held out hopes that the King would be forced into checking French aggression should it continue. In December 1681, Halifax wrote to his brother that “it is certain if the K. of France will not be perswaded to leave the town of Luxembourg at liberty, we are engaged here to call a Parliament.” But Halifax also knew that only a harmonious parliament could enable England to check the French, as he continued that, “in case that by a miracle we should grow wise and agree, the French might perhaps repent the having forced us into our right sense.”<sup>211</sup> As this letter suggests, Halifax was also under the impression that England’s domestic troubles were hampering her ability to act in foreign policy. He did not despair, though, and he assured William in the same month that he would endeavour his utmost to resolve the current domestic troubles so as to prepare England’s foreign aid next. As he wrote to the Prince, “your Highnesse shall never

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<sup>210</sup> Mr. Sidney to the Prince of Orange, 28 June 1681, in Sir John Dalrymple, appendix to book 1 of part 1 to *Memoirs of Great Britain and Ireland; from the dissolution of the last Parliament of Charles II. till the Capture of the French and Spanish Fleets at Vigo*, vol. 1, (London: Printed for A. Strahan, 1790), p. 75.

<sup>211</sup> Halifax to Henry Savile, 5/15 December 1681, in *Savile Correspondence*, p. 249.

bee disappointed in the beleefe you have that I will contribute my endeavours... to all the publique ends that may put us in such a condition at home as may inable us to help our friends abroad.”<sup>212</sup>

In diagnosing England’s domestic deadlock, Halifax would have tended to see Whig extremism as the cause of this. He had blamed the Oxford Parliament’s dissolution on the irreconcilable divisions within it as he explained to his brother that “there were such foundations lay’d for heat and dispute, that the King thought it advisable to part with them.”<sup>213</sup> Even as late in the foreign crisis as January 1682 Halifax wrote to William that a parliament was not likely to be conciliatory, because “wee have men here that will sacrifice every thing to their anger, besides that it is as much the interest of ill men to hinder an agreement, as it is of good men to promote it.”<sup>214</sup> Very likely Halifax was in these instances referring to the extremism of the Whigs. This is abundantly clear if one accepted the attribution of the mid-1681 pamphlet *Observations upon a Late Libel* to Halifax.<sup>215</sup> This pamphlet was written in defence of Charles’ declaration justifying the dissolutions of the previous two Parliaments. In it the author criticised the extremism of the Whigs as the principal reason for these dissolutions. As the author defended Charles’ dissolution of the Oxford Parliament, they wrote that,

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<sup>212</sup> Halifax to the Prince of Orange, 2 December 1681, in van Prinsterer, *Archives*, series 2 tome 5, p. 534.

<sup>213</sup> Halifax to Henry Savile, 29 March/8 April 1681, in *Savile Correspondence*, p. 191.

<sup>214</sup> Halifax to the Prince of Orange, 12 January 1681/[82], in van Prinsterer, *Archives*, series 2 tome 5, p. 470. The letter has been listed as a 1681 letter by van Prinsterer. However, Foxcroft has identified the year of the letter as being in 1682. See, Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, p. 337, n 2.

<sup>215</sup> For a discussion about the approximate period in which the pamphlet first appeared, see Brown, Introduction to Part One, pp. 18-20.

The Excesses of the Commons were beyond the cure of lower remedies, and there was no other choice left, than either to part with the Parliament, or lett the two Houses continue sitting in a State of Hostility hardly possible to be reconciled.<sup>216</sup>

Even if the attribution of *Observations* is doubted, there is circumstantial evidence to suggest that Halifax was acutely aware of Whig extremism. More than most of his colleagues, he would have been particularly predisposed to perceive this. The Whigs had, after all, attempted a political revenge on him for his opposition to Exclusion in 1680.<sup>217</sup> Following those attacks, Halifax unsurprisingly blamed his unenviable situation on the extremism of the Whigs. Between January and March 1681, he had spoken about the “unjust severity of [the] Commons” to Reresby; written to his brother about the “infinite anger” of the Commons; and elsewhere expressed forebodings about confronting an “angry House of Commons” at Oxford.<sup>218</sup> Therefore, when Charles dissolved the Oxford Parliament after the Commons had again insisted on Exclusion and rejected other alternatives, Halifax was already predisposed to agreeing with the King’s declaration about blaming Whig extremism. As such, it is highly probable that Halifax shared the contemporary belief that the Whigs’ extremism was the cause of the current deadlock.

It was in this context of Whig extremism hampering England’s foreign policy that Halifax willingly participated in the government’s anti-Whig measures. During the foreign

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<sup>216</sup> [George Savile, Marquis of Halifax], “Observations upon a late Libell called a Letter from a Person of Quality to his Friend concerning the King’s Declaration &ca.,” in *The Works of George Savile, Marquis of Halifax*, ed. Mark N. Brown, vol. 1, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 152.

<sup>217</sup> See Chapter 3 above.

<sup>218</sup> Reresby, *Memoirs*, p. 210; Halifax to Henry Savile, 6/16 January 1681 and 25 January/4 February 1681, in *Savile Correspondence*, pp. 173, 178.

crisis, these measures were numerous. He participated in the purging of Whig JPs and replacing them with Tories.<sup>219</sup> He facilitated the execution of Whig Propagandist Stephen College and was also involved in the project to secure Shaftesbury's indictment.<sup>220</sup> His confidence in the latter design could be seen when he told Reresby that "ther would be enough [evidence] produced" against Shaftesbury to warrant hanging.<sup>221</sup> Only when it seemed likely that a Whiggish grand jury would return *ignoramus* on Shaftesbury's case did Halifax support his release as a sign of goodwill.<sup>222</sup> Elsewhere he also served as a commissioner on the Commission for Ecclesiastical Promotions. The purpose of this commission was to ensure that all Church promotions went to staunch supporters of the King and Church.<sup>223</sup> This particular appointment was one which Halifax also received some public censure for accepting.<sup>224</sup> Given the prevailing circumstances and his sentiments, Halifax's actions against the Whigs seemed natural at this time. He saw the need for England to check French aggression on the Continent, but he knew that this could not happen until the domestic deadlock at home was resolved. He very likely saw the Whigs as the main cause of this deadlock, so that attacking their political influence was a natural solution to it.

Paralleling these considerations, Halifax's attack on the Whigs was also consistent with the attitudes shown in his aphorisms. His short pieces show a deep concern of the consequences arising from one's identification with infallibility. There is good reason to

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<sup>219</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part One, p. 30; Hutton, *Charles II*, pp. 405-406.

<sup>220</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part One, p. 30; Haley, *Shaftesbury*, p. 659.

<sup>221</sup> Reresby, *Memoirs*, p. 227.

<sup>222</sup> Reresby, *Memoirs*, p. 236. Brown, Introduction to Part One, p. 31.

<sup>223</sup> Robert Beddard, "The Commission for Ecclesiastical Promotions, 1681-1684: An Instrument of Tory Reaction," *The Historical Journal* vol. 10, no. 1 (1967): pp. 11-40.

<sup>224</sup> Reresby, *Memoirs*, p. 232.

believe that Halifax diagnosed this mentality in the Whigs. The author of *Observations* referred to this when they wrote that “there Seemeth to be no other Rule allowed by one sort of Men, than that they cannot erre, and that the King cannot be in the right.”<sup>225</sup> Of the Whig’s push for Exclusion, the author was no less critical in a passage that deserves full quotation:

But the truth is, these Men would impose upon us, that an act of Parliament will secure nothing they doe not like, and doe every thing they have a mind to: For instance, An Act for excluding the Duke is all-sufficient, An Act for limiting him impossible; An act of exclusion will secure all, All other Lawes are but Cobwebs not to be relyed upon. These Riddles are delivered to us with such authority, that wee are to receive them as Oracles, and it is become a Mortall Sinne for any Man to question the Sense of them.<sup>226</sup>

Here the author expressed their scepticism of the Whig’s foresight, describing their ideas about the necessity of Exclusion as uncertain “riddles”. This scepticism was apparent in Halifax’s own aphorisms as shown in the previous chapter. More significantly, the author noted at the fanatical devotion of the Whigs to their ideas about Exclusion. Those “riddles” were being delivered with an air of infallibility, an “authority”, in which anyone who disagreed with them were guilty of “Mortall Sinne”. Again, the contentious attribution of *Observations* needs to be kept in mind, and it should be noted that the identification of the Whigs with radicalism was common among Tories at this time too.<sup>227</sup> On the other hand, even considering the uncertainty of the pamphlet’s authorship, Halifax himself saw a similar

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<sup>225</sup> [Halifax], “Observations”, p. 150.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., pp. 154-155.

<sup>227</sup> Harris, *Restoration*, pp. 242-243.

mentality in the Whigs as well. He had diagnosed this back in 1680, when he lamented to his brother at the intense ire he had provoked from the Exclusionists for “differing with them in some of their darling points, to wch they are at present so wedded that no reason can be admitted in contradiction.”<sup>228</sup> Within Halifax’s aphoristic worldview, such an unsociable mentality presented dangers to the body politic.

The problem with claiming infallibility for one’s ideals was that such claims were always fallible. This view is apparent throughout his aphorisms. Halifax believed there were limits to the human mind, and this shows not only in his remarks about human foresight, but also in his acknowledgement that human ideas were always fallible. He had observed that several human ideas thought to be immoveable and fundamental were liable to exceptions or were abandoned at a later time. With respect to the sciences and philosophy he observed in one aphorism that, “Philosophy, astronomy, &c. have changed their Fundamentals as the Men of Art no doubt called them at the time.”<sup>229</sup> In the case of religion it was similarly observed in another aphorism that “the Fundamentals of Divinity have been changed in several Ages of the World. They have made no difficulty in the several Councils, to destroy and excommunicate Men for asserting Things that at other Times were called Fundamentals.”<sup>230</sup> Moral fundamentals, those precepts founded upon ideas about what was believed to be absolute good and bad were also flawed. This was because good and bad were not always fixed but changed with the circumstances. Hence Halifax reflected in one aphorism that,

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<sup>228</sup> Halifax to Henry Savile, 13/23 December 1680, in *Savile Correspondence*, p. 170.

<sup>229</sup> Halifax, “Political Thoughts and Reflections,” p. 220: 26-28.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220: 22-25.

It is a fundamental in Nature that the Son should not kill the Father, and yet the Senate of *Venice* gave a Reward to a Son who brought in his Father's Head, according to a Proclamation.<sup>231</sup>

Halifax would conclude that human ideas, far from being absolute, were in fact fallible, as he wrote "every thing that is created is Mortal, *ergo* all Fundamentals of human creation will die."<sup>232</sup> For him, claims to infallibility for one's ideals and ideas were erroneous because it was not within the scope of the human understanding to come to absolute truth.

Humanity, however, did not know better; and the consequences were grave. Halifax observed how individuals, identifying their aspirations with the infallibility of their mistaken fundamental ideas, were inspired act out a myriad of unsociable actions against their fellow humans. For him, this was nowhere better seen than in wars for religion. In one aphorism, he reflected that,

The reason why religion has occasioned such disturbances in the world, is because nothing else can bear men out, for falling out about they know not what. It introduces another kind of reasoning, which does not only excuse, but sanctify follies, immoralities, animosities, murder, &c. And there can never be an end of the consequences of that, which can never be understood.<sup>233</sup>

Halifax acknowledged that religious ideas were in the domain of "they know not what" meaning that the human mind can never verify their absolute truths; yet religious fanatics mistakenly believe that such ideas were so infallible that they grant divine authority to or

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., p. 221: 4-7.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., p. 220: 18-19.

<sup>233</sup> Halifax, "Miscellanys," p. 244: 20-25.



“sanctify” acts of “follyes, immortalitys, animositys, murther”. For Halifax, unsociability and its more extreme forms, fanaticism and enthusiasm, arose exactly from this mistaken belief. Political ideals had the potential to inspire this unsociability in individuals too. As one aphorism said,

The *salus populi*, if any is a fundamentall; but the world will seldome agree upon the definition of it; in the contests between King and the people they both generally take it for their Motto. A Club in a coffey house, by the multiplying glasse of their mistaken politiques, will call themselves the Nation.<sup>234</sup>

Again, Halifax acknowledges a certain mystery behind such a fundamental as *Salus Populi*; the idea was there, but its exact manifestation could not exactly be known, hence everyone disagrees on it. Yet, there were those who claim to know exactly how this fundamental was defined and identify their goals with it, taking it up as their “Motto”. Inspired by a belief of infallibility from this identification, each group believes themselves the will and interest of the nation, or rather “call themselves the Nation”. This mentality has implications for the body politic. Such groups will conduct politics through a narrow worldview, a “multiplying glasse”, which saw anyone not of their belief as against their narrow definition of national interest. From this, came the same disastrous potential for individuals to fall out “about they know not what.” For Halifax, the erroneous belief of the infallibility of one’s ideals and aspirations carried dangerous consequences for the wider body politic.

Such concerns inform Halifax’s criticisms about political parties in general. In his aphorisms he diagnosed this unsociable mentality in these ideological groupings. In the first place, he observed that parties already had a tendency to identify their ideals with

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<sup>234</sup> Halifax, “Fundamentalls,” p. 139: 4-8.

infallibility. However, such identifications were tenuous. As one aphorism said, “Every Party, when they find a Maxim for their turn, they presently call it a Fundamental, they think they nail it with a Peg of Iron, whereas in truth they only tie it with a wisp of Straw.”<sup>235</sup> It should not be unsurprising, then, to see that Halifax saw in political parties that tendency for unsociability towards those not of their ranks. As he reflected in another aphorism, “the best Party is but a kind of a Conspiracy against the rest of the Nation. They put every body else out of their Protection.”<sup>236</sup> In another aphorism he observed that parties, in their struggles against each other, forget their responsibilities in the wider community. “Whilst severall parties are at football, they will break all the windows in the town”.<sup>237</sup> More relevant to the situation that Halifax was facing between 1681 and 1682 was the notion that domestic political parties would disregard foreign policy considerations in their ideological struggles with one another. As one aphorism remarked,

It groweth to be the Master Thought; the Eagerness against one another at home, being a nearer Object, extinguisheth that which we ought to have against our foreign Enemies; and few Men’s Understanding can get above overvaluing the Danger that is nearest, in comparison of that more remote.<sup>238</sup>

Therefore, Halifax perceived that same singular and unsociable mentality as that which came with one’s identification with infallibility.

Aside from considerations of foreign policy, Halifax’s attack on the Whigs was consistent with his deep concern of the consequences arising from one’s identification with infallibility. Furthermore, this concern also offers a way to understanding his moderation in

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<sup>235</sup> Halifax, “Political Thoughts,” p. 220: 3-5.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., p. 235: 8-9.

<sup>237</sup> Halifax, “Fundamentalls,” p. 146: 7-8.

<sup>238</sup> Halifax, “Political Thoughts,” p. 235: 19-23.

his attack on the Whigs. The concern shown in his aphorisms about political parties was largely about mentality and not so much the actual individuals. In line with this, Halifax did not seem to be committed to the Whig's political demise. He seemed content to allow them to exist as long as they shed their uncompromising mentality. Accordingly, Halifax welcomed and encouraged reconciliation as the opportunities arose. One such opportunity came during the months of Shaftesbury's imprisonment in 1681. Before a Whig grand jury returned a verdict of *ignoramus* on his case in November, there were fears among the party that his imprisonment was but the prelude to further rounds of arrests.<sup>239</sup> This gave incentive for a compromise between the Crown and the Whigs. The latter offered to conduct themselves with moderation in exchange for the King granting them a general amnesty. Such suggestions began circulating in September, with talk that an amnesty should be given to all, including Danby and Shaftesbury and that the "King of England offer on his part to forget all, provided the parliament on theirs will change their conduct with regard to him."<sup>240</sup> Of such a design Halifax gave full support, with French ambassador Paul Barillon being informed that he "has this project in his head, and talks on every occasion, like a man who has no other design than to reconcile the King of England with his people."<sup>241</sup> As the foreign crisis reached its peak in February 1682, Halifax was also urging Charles to make the first move and call a parliament regardless of the Whigs. According to Reresby, Halifax argued to the King that the foreign situation demanded a parliament, and that there was

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<sup>239</sup> J. R. Jones, *The First Whigs: The Politics of the Exclusion Crisis, 1678-1683* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 196; Lacey, *Dissent and Parliamentary Politics*, p. 151.

<sup>240</sup> Translated dispatch from Mr. Barillon to Louis XIV, 22 September 1681, in Dalrymple, appendix to book 1 of part 1 to *Memoirs of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 1, p. 88; see also Longford to Ormonde, 24 September 1681, in Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Ormonde*, New Series vol. 6, pp. 165-166.

<sup>241</sup> Translated dispatch from Mr. Barillon to Louis XIV, 22 September 1681, in Dalrymple, appendix to book 1 of part 1 to *Memoirs of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 1, p. 88.

nothing to discourage it “but the fear that they [the Whigs] might fly upon high points [such as Exclusion]”. Halifax advised that if that were to happen the King could simply dissolve Parliament without impunity. But so long as Charles was willing to summon it, there was always the possibility of an agreement. If that should happen, Halifax reasoned that “his Majesty would then gain the great point to be united at home and formidable abroad.”<sup>242</sup>

As suggested here, Halifax seemed content with allowing a more sociable Whig party to exist rather than being fully committed to their political demise. Brown summarised his conduct appropriately when he wrote that Halifax “was not, it seems, vindictive towards the Whigs; he wanted to remove their sting, not destroy them.”<sup>243</sup> In these acts of moderation, Halifax was probably mindful of the current foreign situation and was sensible that the co-operation of the Whigs was needed in calling a harmonious parliament to check French aggression. On the other hand, his nuanced conduct was in keeping with his attitudes shown in his aphorisms. They suggest a deep concern about singular and unsociable mentalities harmful to the body politic. Furthermore, his thoughts about political parties show that part of their danger lay in such mentalities. In view of this consistency, it is plausible to see Halifax’s conduct as working to diffuse the Whigs’ extremism, a mentality similar to that which he was concerned about in his aphorisms.

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<sup>242</sup> Reresby, *Memoirs*, pp. 248-249.

<sup>243</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part One, p. 31.

### After the foreign crisis

In the end Halifax was unable to facilitate the desired reconciliation. Such a reconciliation turned out altogether unnecessary. In March 1682, the French King voluntarily lifted his siege on Luxembourg, ostensibly so that the various German states could focus on a looming Turkish threat.<sup>244</sup> The passing of this foreign crisis marked the end of Halifax's short though notable effort at facilitating a national reconciliation. Charles' government continued its efforts to suppress the Whig opposition and their bases of support. Halifax continued his participation in these policies. He became further involved in the acquiring and reissuing of new corporation charters so as to give the Crown a greater control of over the municipal corporations. Accordingly, it was recorded that sixty-six of the new corporation charters passed through Halifax's office while he was Lord Privy Seal from 1682.<sup>245</sup>

There were, however, signs that Halifax was not always fully compliant with the Tory programme to destroy the Whigs. One possible example was when Halifax vigorously attempted to delay the forthcoming *quo warranto* verdict as the Whigs were about to lose their London City charter in June 1683.<sup>246</sup> Exact motivations for this is not apparent, but Ronald Hutton suggested that this was to allow room for negotiations between the two sides.<sup>247</sup> Furthermore, it is also possible that some observers at court were detecting a certain independence in Halifax's conduct that was not completely in line with the Tory

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<sup>244</sup> Hutton, *Charles the Second*, p. 411.

<sup>245</sup> *Journals of the House of Lords*, vol. 14, (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office), p. 394.

<sup>246</sup> Kenyon, *Sunderland*, p. 88.

<sup>247</sup> Hutton, *Charles the Second*, p. 420.

programme. This was the case for the Tory Duke of Ormonde, who re-entered English politics in 1682, after he was recalled from Ireland where he was serving as Lord Lieutenant.<sup>248</sup> The next year in January 1683, he wrote to his son an account of the rivalling factions in the nation and said,

We are now come under the three denominations of Tories, Whigs, and Trimmers.

The first and last have patronage at Court. The language of the last is moderation, unity, and peace, joining with the Whigs in their care of Religion, and property, and with the Tories for Monarchy and a just and loyal prerogative.<sup>249</sup>

Ormonde suspected that those trimmers who were not in government think “the Earl of Halifax to be their Patron, and his converse gives cause to believe it.” In matters of actual policy, though, Ormonde knew better. “In consultation he, as yet, is in most things unanimous with the thoroughest Tories”, he wrote. Nonetheless, there were occasions where “when there is any difference of opinion, it [Halifax’s advice] seems to me to lead in the trimming Way.”<sup>250</sup> As Ormonde suggested, though Halifax was in the main among the “thoroughest Tories”, he was not completely in line with the views of his Tory colleagues and had occasions in which he followed the “trimming Way”, which involved the idea of reconciling with the Whigs. Halifax, it would seem, continued to show glimpses of moderation towards the Whigs. The issue of the Whigs, however, was about to come to an effective end a few months after Ormonde wrote this letter. A new phase in Halifax’s politics was also about to begin.

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid., pp. 414-416.

<sup>249</sup> Ormonde to Arran, 10 January 1682/3. This letter was printed in Winifred Anne Henrietta Christina Herbert Gardner, Baroness of Burghclere, *The Life of James First Duke of Ormonde 1610-1688*, vol. 2 (London: John Murray, Albermale Street, W., 1912), p. 372.

<sup>250</sup> Ormonde to Arran, 10 January 1682/3. In *ibid.*, p. 372.

## **Chapter 5 – Charles II's Last Years**

The Whig threat largely passed away in the advent of the Rye House Plot revelations. In the resulting fallout, the Whig leadership effectively collapsed and its bases of support were dispersed. In his newfound security, Charles was able to act more independently than during the Exclusion Crisis. In this independence, however, Halifax became disturbed by Charles' unconstitutional and Catholic leaning tendencies. This chapter will outline Halifax's attempts to steer the King away from unpopular rule. As will be shown, Halifax did not idly observe those tendencies and on many occasions voiced his concerns to the King. He argued that it was prudential for Charles to avoid popular discontent. It will be shown that such practical advice from Halifax was characteristic, given his sceptical ideas about government authority expressed in his aphorisms. Halifax in his aphorisms believed that there were practical limitations in government authority regardless of its claims to unlimited power. Furthermore, it was the mood of a nation's people that was the greatest factor making up those practical limitations. Within the worldview of Halifax's aphorisms, it was prudent policy to acknowledge the practical limitations of government and not spark popular discontent when it could be avoided. It was a theme that would later be expressed in his famous *Character of a Trimmer* late in 1684.

### **Steering the King away from unpopular rule**

Charles was able to successfully suppress the Whigs after the discovery of two plots in June 1683. One of these plots involved the assassination of the King and his brother,

whilst the other simply involved the seizing of the King.<sup>251</sup> These two plots were lumped together and later became known as the Rye House Plot. The discovery of this very real plot gave the government all the ammunition it needed to increase the ruthlessness of its measures against the Whigs and the Protestant Dissenters. The government moved swiftly against the Whig leaders implicated in the Plot. Essex was arrested as a conspirator and died in imprisonment; Lord Russel and Algernon Sydney were sentenced and executed.<sup>252</sup> These and other arrests combined with the fact that Shaftesbury had already died in exile by this time marked the collapse of the Whig leadership.<sup>253</sup> At the grassroots level, the persecution of the Dissenters further intensified in the aftermath of the Plot revelations. With the King and Tory propaganda associating Protestant nonconformists with the Whigs, they naturally became indirectly implicated in the Rye House conspiracies.<sup>254</sup> Outward support for the monarchy now also experienced a renewed surge as people took pains to disassociate themselves from the Plot.<sup>255</sup> The overall outcome of all this was the effective collapse of the Whig faction for the time being, its leaders disposed of and its sympathisers suppressed and dispersed. So decisive was the Crown's victory, in fact, that Harris would remark that "by the time of James II's accession the position of the monarchy had been considerably strengthened and the Whig Challenge effectively defeated."<sup>256</sup>

Charles enjoyed a large measure of independence in his newfound security. The collapse of the Whigs and the definite surge in public support meant that Charles was able

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<sup>251</sup> Hutton, *Charles the Second*, pp. 420-421.

<sup>252</sup> Hutton, *Charles the Second*, p. 421; Harris, *Restoration*, pp. 312-316.

<sup>253</sup> Jones, *The First Whigs*, p. 8. Shaftesbury died in Amsterdam on 21 January 1683.

<sup>254</sup> Harris, *Restoration*, p. 322; Lacey, *Dissent and Parliamentary Politics*, p. 159..

<sup>255</sup> Harris, *Restoration*, pp. 317-321.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.* p. 408.



to conduct policies and measures that would have provoked public uproar in the prior years. In 1684, riding on the surge of public support he now enjoyed, he wilfully neglected his obligation to summon a parliament three years after his last in accordance with the Triennial Act of 1664. His secure domestic position also enabled him to show more leniency towards Catholics without major opposition. In May 1684, he readmitted his Catholic brother back into government without major opposition.<sup>257</sup> Some contemporaries, however, were undoubtedly disgruntled at this as they saw this as a direct violation of the Test Act denying government offices to Catholics.<sup>258</sup> Then in October, Charles ordered the release of loyal Catholics recusants imprisoned during the Popish Plot panic.<sup>259</sup> A further notable action was Charles' decision in December to separate the control of the Irish army from the Lord Lieutenancy of Ireland, which was planned to be given to the staunchly Protestant Earl of Rochester. He then gave two Catholics, Richard Talbot and Justin MacCarthy, the command of regiments.<sup>260</sup>

Halifax was at this time deeply involved in an internal power struggle for the King's influence against a faction composed of York, Sunderland and the Duchess of Portsmouth. It was a contest that saw constant political manoeuvring from both sides as they each tried to gain the upper hand. It was also a contest that lasted up until Charles' death in February 1685, whereupon James succeeded his late brother.<sup>261</sup> Despite these preoccupations, there

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<sup>257</sup> Hutton, *Charles the Second*, p. 422; Jones, *Charles II*, p. 183.

<sup>258</sup> Reresby, *Memoirs*, pp. 338-339.

<sup>259</sup> Jones, *Charles II*, p. 185; Hutton, *Charles the Second*, pp. 424-425.

<sup>260</sup> Jones, *Charles II*, p. 185; Hutton, *Charles the Second*, p. 437.

<sup>261</sup> Details about this internal struggle is scattered throughout chapter nine of *Life and Letters*. See specifically Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, pp. 357-435. A narrative of the inner workings of the government at this time is also given by Kenyon. See Kenyon, *Sunderland*, pp. 74-110. Finally, Brown gives a summary of this internal conflict. See, Brown, Introduction to Part One, pp. 36-40.

was every indication that Halifax was concerned with Charles' actions at this time. In January 1684, just as the three years stipulated by the Triennial Act was about to lapse, Halifax related to Reresby that he had "been very earnest with the King for a Parliament". Accordingly, Halifax argued vigorously for Charles to summon a parliament in accordance with the law.<sup>262</sup> In October, as the question of releasing the Catholic recusants from imprisonment was being discussed, Halifax initially opposed the suggestion. But when the King expressed his desire to release those Catholics who had rendered loyal services to the Crown, Halifax compromised by agreeing that any releases should be done on a case-by-case basis. This was as opposed to a sweeping pardon, as Sunderland was suggesting.<sup>263</sup> Then, when Charles spoke to Halifax about MacCarthy's appointment, the Marquis again attempted to dissuade the King from it.<sup>264</sup>

Central to Halifax's concerns was Charles' seeming neglect of his obligations to his people. From the Marquis' point of view, the King was not fulfilling his promises to rule according to the laws and Protestant interests. When Halifax spoke out against Charles' decisions, he reminded him of these obligations and warned about the discontent that might arise if he ignored them. As Halifax urged the King that a parliament should be summoned in accordance with the Triennial Act, he brought up various arguments why it was prudent for him to comply with it. Halifax emphasised that Charles had promised to rule by law when he dissolved the Oxford Parliament in 1681 and that since now a parliament

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<sup>262</sup> Reresby, *Memoirs*, p. 327.

<sup>263</sup> Leopold von Ranke, *A History of England principally in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. C. W. Boase and G. W. Kitchin, trans. C. W. Boase, W. W. Jackson, et al., vol. 4, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1875), p. 199; Brown, Introduction to Part One, 51-52; Hutton, *Charles the Second*, 425.

<sup>264</sup> Burnet, *History*, vol. 1, p. 389.

was required by law to be summoned, “nothing ought to be so dear to him as to keep his word with his people.” There was also the possibility that it would sow new seeds of opposition, since “an ill construction might be made” of his noncompliance with the Act.<sup>265</sup> Similarly, when Charles spoke of MacCarthy’s commission in the Irish army, the Marquis advised against it on the grounds of legality and prudence. According to Burnet, to whom Halifax related this exchange, Charles supported the legality of this appointment by arguing that “he was not tied up by the laws of Ireland as he was by the laws of England.” Upon this, Halifax disagreed, offering “to argue that point with any person that asserted it before him.” He further cautioned the King that “that army was raised by a protestant parliament, to secure the protestant interest” and suggested that the appointment would give reason for his subjects to suspect that “where his hands were not bound up, he would show all the favour he could to the papists.” Halifax added that it would be better if the King rewarded MacCarthy “in pensions and other favours, than in a way that would raise so much clamour and jealousy.”<sup>266</sup> In voicing these concerns, it can be seen that Halifax was attempting to steer Charles away from decisions that would alienate him from his largely Protestant nation.

Halifax’s concern about Charles’ conduct was consistent with the ideas expressed in his aphorisms. He did not believe in the theoretically unlimited nature of government authority. To him, government authority was not determined by the speculative ideals about it, but rather by the material forces that support it, such as the support of its people. A government may in theory claim absolute authority over its subjects, but those subjects

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<sup>265</sup> Reresby, *Memoirs*, p. 327.

<sup>266</sup> Burnet, *History*, vol. 1, p. 389.

were not always complacent to such claims. Halifax observed that the people, once roused and antagonised, were capable of real anarchic violence. As he reflected in one aphorism, “there is accumulative Cruelty in a number of Men, though none in particular are ill-natured” so that “the angry Buzz of a Multitude is one of the Bloodiest Noises in the World.”<sup>267</sup> Similarly in another aphorism Halifax wrote that “the Body of the People are generally either so dead that they cannot move, or so mad that they cannot be reclaimed.” Moderation simply cannot subsist in the multitude, for “to be neither all in a Flame, nor quite cold, requireth more Reason than great Numbers can ever attain.”<sup>268</sup> For this reason, the people should not be thought of as something that would complacently accept any treatment imposed upon them; rather, the collective should be considered as “a slow heavy beast” who takes “a great while before it can get up” but when roused takes equal time “before it can lye down again.”<sup>269</sup> To Halifax, it was this beast, whose actions have material impact, which stood in the way of claims to absolute power.

Halifax’s ideas about the people as a slumbering but potentially violent beast have implications for his ideas about the nature of government. His wider views about the relationship between a government and its people will be further explored in the next chapter; it is here only sufficient to stress that his ideas about the multitude lent itself to an acknowledgement of the practical limitations of government authority. As one aphorism warned, “admitt it to bee a Fundamentall, that nobody ought to resist a Government; yet if it is at least as sure, that in some cases the people will rise against it, what doth the

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<sup>267</sup> Halifax, “Political Thoughts,” p. 229: 25-27.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., p. 229: 9-12.

<sup>269</sup> Halifax, “Miscellanys,” p. 212: 13-14.

Government gain by a Speculative Maxime, whilst Nature and practise stand in opposition to it?"<sup>270</sup> Halifax observed that fundamental notions asserting a government's absolute nature have limitations in practice, because such notions as "that nobody ought to resist a Government" could be challenged in practical reality. Such abstract fundamentals do not describe the nature of governments as they really were. To Halifax, there was a distinction between governments in abstraction and governments in practice. This distinction can be seen in another aphorism,

"If the people are in the wrong, when they vindicate what they think to be their right, their being in fault doth not avail the Government that is destroyed by it. If such causes do produce such effects, there needeth no further arguing; and the reproaching a people with breaking a rule, &c. is but a small Consolation, and especially to those who gave the first temptation to it. It is a fundamentall in reason, not to provoke a strong creature, &c."<sup>271</sup>

Here, Halifax contrasted the importance of a government's moral and theoretical claims to power with that of the material factors that challenge those claims, namely a general rebellion. The former did not dictate the course of events, but the latter did. In the aftermath of a rebellion, those who represented the destroyed government can reproach the rebels for breaching fundamental rules and laws. But a rebellion produces such real and self-evident consequences, that "there needeth no further arguing" and it was "small Consolation" to reproach it on the basis of abstract ideas. To Halifax, there was a distinction

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<sup>270</sup> Halifax, "Fundamentalls," pp. 139-140: 34-5.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., p. 139: 10-17. Halifax's use of the word "fundamentall" in this context is taken to mean best practice rather than an actual fundamental. Evidence supporting this interpretation lies in another aphorism, wherein the Marquis wrote, "it is not always reasonable to follow reason, without exception". See, Halifax, "Miscellanys," p. 141: 15.

between theoretical authority and effective authority. The former could claim to be absolute, but the latter was in fact limited by material factors, such as the compliance of its people. Therefore, Halifax was deeply aware that government authority was in actuality limited, despite what speculative theories have to say about it. His attempts to persuade Charles away from what he saw as unpopular policies was in keeping with this awareness.

Halifax showed this pragmatic line of thinking when in December 1684 he warned Charles about the disadvantages of having an unpopular government. At that time, the Privy Council was occupied with a debate of what form of government the New England colonies should be reconstituted into. It was suggested that a governor and council, solely responsible to the crown, should be given powers to govern their colonies as they deemed necessary. Halifax took the opposite side of this. Accordingly, Barillon reported to Louis that Halifax on this occasion “took upon him to contend with great warmth, that there could be no doubt whatever but that the same laws which are in force in England, should be also established in a country inhabited by Englishmen.” The force of his speech was vigorous, making use of every argument “by which it could be proved, that an absolute government is neither so happy nor so safe, as that which is tempered by laws, and which sets bounds to the authority of the prince.” According to this French dispatch, Halifax also supposedly “exaggerated the inconveniences of a sovereign power, and plainly declared that he could not make up his mind to live under a king who should have it in his power to take, whenever he thought proper, the money he had in his pocket.”<sup>272</sup> The terms in which Halifax described

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<sup>272</sup> Translated dispatch from Paul Barillon to Louis XIV, 7 December 1684, printed in *A Translation of the French Letters in the appendix to Mr Fox's History of the early part of the reign of James the Second*, ed. and trans. Charles James Fox (London: William Miller, Albemarle-Street, 1808), pp. 1-2.

arbitrary government is significant. Halifax did not touch on the morality or theoretical flaws of arbitrary governments, but instead stressed that its claims to absolute power actually threatened its stability rather than reinforce it. As to why this was so, Halifax implied that the answer lay in practical reality; that any individual rationally interested in advancing their own happiness would never willingly support a government that had the power to take it away on a whim. The implicit connection vaguely suggested here was that the unpopularity of a government tended to dissolve the stability of it, regardless of the supposedly unlimited power of the governors. All this further hints at the practical outlook through which Halifax saw Charles' unconstitutional and potentially unpopular conduct at this time.

#### Halifax's final appeal: *The Character of a Trimmer*

By the end of 1684, Halifax's position in Charles' ministry was uncertain. The internal struggle between Halifax and James' faction continued and there is disagreement among scholars as to who was gaining the upper hand. Foxcroft took the view that Halifax was in ascendancy. She surmised, "with little fear of error, that Lord Halifax was to replace his Royal Highness [James] as 'chief favorite and minister,' with the promise, express or implied, of a free hand in affairs both foreign and domestic."<sup>273</sup> Kenyon and Brown, on the other hand, were of the view that Halifax's influence was in apparent and real decline. Brown pointed to the Marquis' supposedly precarious situation in the ministry, whereas Kenyon took the stronger view that Halifax's dismissal was only a matter of time.<sup>274</sup> Halifax's actual

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<sup>273</sup> Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, p. 422.

<sup>274</sup> Kenyon, *Sunderland*, pp. 108-109; Brown, Introduction to Part One, pp. 38-39.

position at this time is still up for debate. Hutton believed that these contradictory views are evidence of Charles' cunning, remarking that "never had this monarch's favourite tactic, of telling everybody what they wanted to hear, created greater bewilderment."<sup>275</sup> Whatever was the case, it was apparent that Halifax's various advice was being largely ignored. For instance, no parliament was summoned and MacCarthy kept his military commission. Halifax's next attempt at promoting his suggestions would be indirect, through a pamphlet entitled *The Character of a Trimmer*. Likely composed between mid to late 1684, the pamphlet was distributed anonymously in manuscript form and began occasioning discussion among contemporaries in the following January.<sup>276</sup>

As with Halifax's current political situation, there is also debate among scholars as to the exact purpose and target audience of this pamphlet. Foxcroft saw the pamphlet as "the sketch of a political programme primarily intended for the royal eye."<sup>277</sup> Gooch believed that Halifax wrote the piece to "vindicate his character and his creed" from such hostile Tory propagandists as Roger L'Estrange, who had been attacking political moderates for some time ever since the collapse of the Whigs.<sup>278</sup> Brown saw the pamphlet as an attempt "to influence the King indirectly by writing an anonymous appeal to public opinion."<sup>279</sup> Halifax's domestic chaplain, also gave his own opinion on this as he wrote that the pamphlet was to promote "under a seeming trifle the best Council that could be given to the King and to the

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<sup>275</sup> Hutton, *Charles the Second*, pp. 441-442.

<sup>276</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part One, pp. 33-34.

<sup>277</sup> Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, p. 429.

<sup>278</sup> Gooch, *Political Thought*, pp. 142-143; Brown, Introduction to Part One, pp. 40-42; Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, p. 429.

<sup>279</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part One, p. 61.



well-meaning part of the Nation.”<sup>280</sup> Despite the varying interpretations of the pamphlet, it is sufficient for the purposes of this narrative to go by one broad suggestion. Whether *Character of a Trimmer* was the “sketch of a political programme”; a defence of his politics and policies; or a propaganda piece intended to influence public opinion, these interpretations all point to the idea that the pamphlet was an attempt by Halifax to promote a political point of view. In this sense, Halifax’s *Character of a Trimmer* can be regarded as another attempt to offer his advice on government through a more indirect medium.

On the surface, *Character of a Trimmer* was a defence against the attacks on political moderation by Tory propagandists. In the pamphlet’s own words, it sought to set out “the *Trimmer’s* principles and opinions” for all to decide “whether he can with Justice be so arraigned”.<sup>281</sup> As indicated by the various scholarly debates surrounding the pamphlet, Halifax’s *Character of a Trimmer* was more complex than a mere justification of political moderation. In the course of defending their principles, the *Trimmer* of the pamphlet went on to discuss his opinions on government, religion and foreign policy. On each of these topics, the pamphlet promoted various policy and political recommendations. On the topic of government, an overarching theme was its promotion of constitutional government, where the monarch ruled according to the laws rather than arbitrarily.<sup>282</sup> In the sections relating to the treatment of religious minorities, the *Trimmer* recommended that a measure

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<sup>280</sup> This was originally quoted by Foxcroft, who took it from “Saviliana”. Brown also reproduces this quote. See Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, p. 429 n4; Brown, Introduction to Part One, p. 45.

<sup>281</sup> Halifax, “The Character of a Trimmer”, p. 180. Oblique references to writers such as L’Estrange can also be found in the pamphlet. Halifax’s reference to the government employing “small authors” is an example of this. See *Ibid.*, pp. 190-191.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 180-199.

of leniency be given to both Protestant Dissenters and Catholics when executing penal laws against them.<sup>283</sup>

The section on foreign policy indicated Halifax's continuing concern with French aggression abroad. This concern should be further seen in the context of Charles' growing complacency with regards to the French. This trend could be seen even before the Rye House Plot revelations. After Louis withdrew from Luxembourg in 1682, Charles was able to largely resist the attempts of Spain and William of Orange to pull him into a war against France. Accordingly, the King showed little sympathy to William when France invaded his ancestral territory of Orange; and he ignored the Spanish when they declared war on France in December 1683 in an attempt to rouse support from the Dutch and English. Charles' complacency here, however, did not violate England's treaty with the Spanish since it was purely defensive. Nonetheless, Louis XIV benefited from Spain's failed retaliation. Spain was to lose Luxembourg to France and forced into a twenty-year truce in the summer of 1684.<sup>284</sup> In line with Halifax's antipathy towards French aggression, the Trimmer of the pamphlet emphasised the dangers of French ambitions and criticised those in government who supported a Francophile foreign policy.<sup>285</sup>

Such were the overarching thoughts and recommendations of the Trimmer. However, a parallel of themes can be seen running between the pamphlet and Halifax's concern of Charles' misconduct at this time. Throughout the pamphlet, there was a notable

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid., pp. 199-211.

<sup>284</sup> Jones, *Charles II*, p. 180; Hutton, *Charles the Second*, pp. 426-427.

<sup>285</sup> Halifax, "Character of a Trimmer," pp. 223-239.

emphasis on the practical limits of authority and the need to avoid unpopular governments. The pamphlet was rife with passages arguing that it was practical for a monarch to keep his people content rather than disgruntled. For example, a Prince should rule according to the law, because it makes his conduct automatically arbitrary by being in accordance with plain reason and the universal opinion of his subjects; the laws also serve to rescue the monarch from pursuing policies that are disagreeable to these two aspects.<sup>286</sup> Furthermore, if a prince decides to rule arbitrarily, then he must reckon with resistance rather than absolute obedience. As the Trimmer said, when power is exercised without regard for the people, or what he called a "Principle of Love", "there can be no true Allegiance, and there must remaine the perpetual seeds of Resistance against a Power which is built upon such an unnatural foundation as that of fear and Terrour." As a consequence, the Trimmer later continued that "there can be no lasting radicall securitie, but where the governed are satisfied with the Governours". For this reason, it was observed that "the bravest Princes in all times, who were incapable of any other kind of feare, have feared to greive their own people."<sup>287</sup> The Trimmer hence made a noticeable attempt to persuade its readers that it was imprudent for a ruler to govern without regard to the interests of their people. This was a theme consistent with Halifax's aphorisms on the topic as well as his actual concerns about Charles' conduct at the time.

However, it was in the conclusion that the Trimmer developed this theme to its natural conclusion. Almost echoing Halifax's own aphorisms, the Trimmer reminded his readers that fundamentals about government have no bearing in practice if the people will

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., pp. 188-190.

not admit to them. "It is to be remembred, That if Princes have Law and Authoritie on their side, the People on theirs may have Nature, which is a formidable Adversary." Law and authority, being the result of human principles, lose their impact in the face of human nature provoked; a people acting upon self-preserving instincts would scarcely care for the moral imperatives that underpin law and authority. As the Trimmer continued, "Duty, Justice, Religion, nay even human Prudence too, biddeth the people suffer every thing rather than resist; but uncorrected Nature, where ever it feeleth a smart, will run to the nearest Remedy." Human passions in this case were to be considered as much as how people ought to act, and the Trimmer warned "if their passions are provoked, they being as much a part of us as any of our Limbs, they lead men into a short way of arguing that admitteth no distinctions, and from the foundation of selfe defence, they will draw Inferences that will have miserable Effects upon the quiet of a Government."<sup>288</sup> In short, this passage makes clear that there was a distinction between the theoretical and practical bounds of government authority and that a ruler should heed the latter if they wished to avoid national instability.

The *Character of a Trimmer* can be read as a more explicit warning of what would happen should Charles continue to conduct policies that laid the foundations of popular discontent. For the purposes of this narrative, it should not matter whether these reminders were primarily for Charles or whether Halifax was cautioning the moderate Tories against supporting the King's current policies. Either way, the pamphlet, while promoting a series of recommendations, sought to remind its readers, some of who have political power at court,

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid., pp. 241-242.

that there were practical limits to government authority and that if the King desired to rule without trouble he would do well to keep his people content. Such warnings were consistent with Halifax's concerns relating to Charles' conduct at this time. He had consistently tried to steer Charles away from what he saw as unconstitutional and unpopular policies. But as he was unsuccessful in these attempts the pamphlet can be seen as an indirect continuation of these efforts. That Halifax would continue those efforts given his current concerns was consistent with his aphorisms, which deemed it a necessity for a government to heed the practical limitations of its authority, regardless of its theoretical claims to power.

However, it is impossible to know whether Charles would have taken Halifax's advice to heart. Shortly after the circulation of *Character of a Trimmer*, the King would suddenly pass away in February 1685. His brother James would then ascend to the throne, and, as the next chapter will show, carry out policies that would alienate the majority of the English nation. Charles may not have lived long enough to see if Halifax's advice carried any wisdom, but James II certainly would.

## **Chapter 6 – James II's Reign**

James II's reign began on a high note in his first year. Many factors contributed to this. He was able to reassure his English subjects of his intentions to rule constitutionally and to preserve the established church; the parliament which met turned out to be favourable towards him; and he was able to eliminate the threat to his royal succession from the Duke of Monmouth. All these developments meant that James had secured a comfortable domestic position by late 1685. Yet, almost immediately he would go on to alienate his nation and ultimately bring about a domestic crisis that would see him dethroned three years later. The prime cause for such developments was James' dogged pursuit to revive Catholicism in England.

Halifax over this period did not sit idly by as James worked to further his goals. He opposed the King's Catholic designs from the outset and was dismissed from office for it. Still, he would play his part outside of government. He would go on to frustrating the King's policies by contributing to and encouraging a national noncompliance. This chapter outlines Halifax's efforts to frustrate James' Catholic cause in conjunction with the domestic developments as it happened. In the course of this chapter, the aphorisms will be examined in relation to Halifax's politics at this time. The previous chapter discussed his aphoristic thoughts about the practical limits of government authority. This chapter will emphasise that his strategy of mobilising national noncompliance was consistent with this. In doing so, this chapter will suggest that it was characteristic of Halifax to opt for such a strategy given the ideas expressed in his aphorisms.

This chapter also examines another area of Halifax's conduct at this time. This was Halifax's decision to distance himself from the eventual invitation to William that would ultimately bring about the Glorious Revolution. Whereas the Marquis hedged his bets on passive resistance to oppose James, there were others who opted for a more direct approach to expediting the domestic crisis. These were the people who would eventually invite William to intervene directly in English affairs. Halifax's cautiousness will become apparent as he opposed such an approach and consistently warned William against direct action. Furthermore, such cautiousness in avoiding potentially rash actions was consistent with Halifax's aphorisms. His short pieces indicated a deep awareness about the fragility of one's reason and how easily one can err by yielding to a sudden impulse, such as an excessive eagerness to achieve a particular end. Halifax was, in other words, self-conscious about how easily one can lose their ability to make rational decisions when yielding too much to their eagerness.

#### Halifax's short tenure in office under the new King

The first few months of James II's reign saw him amass immense political capital. The fears and anxieties about his succession, laid out so vividly during the years of the Exclusion Crisis, were largely allayed by a swift public promise, before he was even crowned. In his highly publicized promise, James endeavoured to preserve England's church and state as it was by law established. With such reassurances from the future King, James' accession was

met with relative popularity.<sup>289</sup> Further cementing James' position was the Tory-Anglican disposition of his new Parliament.<sup>290</sup> This Parliament, when it sat in May, would confirmed its support for the monarchy by granting a revenue that satisfied James' expectations.<sup>291</sup> James was standing on firm footing, so when the Duke of Monmouth sought to overthrow the new King in June the Duke received little backing from the nation.<sup>292</sup> The Monmouth Rebellion was crushed a month later and the Duke was consequently captured and executed. James therefore started his reign on a high note, with him enjoying popular support and having disposed of a major rival to his succession. But underpinning the nation's support for the new King was an expectation that he would keep his promise to preserve the Church and state as by law established.<sup>293</sup> As events turned out, James did not make good on his promise.

Halifax remained as Privy Counsellor for a short while upon James' accession. Despite past animosities, the Marquis told the new King in a private audience that he would serve with zeal so long as he was not required to undertake anything inconsistent with the laws. James, for his part, was willing to retain the services of Halifax, telling him that he would remember nothing except for the role he played in opposing the Whigs during the Exclusion Crisis.<sup>294</sup> But the new King also indicated clearly how little Halifax was in his

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<sup>289</sup> Steve Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 96-99; Harris, *Revolution*, pp. 41-43, 46-52.

<sup>290</sup> Harris, *Revolution*, pp. 54-57.

<sup>291</sup> Harris, *Revolution*, pp. 71-72; Miller, *James II*, pp. 136-137.

<sup>292</sup> Harris, *Revolution*, p. 81; Pincus, *1688*, pp. 114-115.

<sup>293</sup> Harris, *Revolution*, pp. 93-94; Miller, *James II*, pp. 137.

<sup>294</sup> Gilbert Burnet, *A Supplement to Burnet's History of my Own Time*, ed. H. C. Foxcroft (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), pp. 144-145. Burnet's published account has a noticeably different emphasis compared to the manuscript excerpt in the *Supplement*. Cf. Gilbert Burnet, *Bishop Burnet's History of His Own Time: From the Restoration of Charles II. to the Treaty of Peace at Utrecht, in the Reign of Queen Anne. A New Edition with*



confidence. Shortly after his succession, James promptly transferred Halifax from the office of Lord Privy Seal to the largely ceremonial Lord President.<sup>295</sup> Halifax took this ministerial set back with seeming equanimity. He told Reresby in April that he would continue to provide his services to the King and only hoped that “his Majesty would put noe discouragement upon them by imposing the popish religion.”<sup>296</sup> His apprehensions were to be well-founded.

Given the situation that eventually developed and Halifax’s own personal sentiments, his dismissal was inevitable. His forebodings about James’ enthusiasm to revive Catholicism in England had been accurate. From the outset, James had intentions to pursue measures in favour of Catholics. These intentions were eventually modest as James was unsure of the support he enjoyed, but they eventually grew to the ambitious goal of putting the Catholic faith on equal footing with Protestantism.<sup>297</sup> Concrete signs that Halifax was concerned with James’ growing aims can be seen after the Monmouth Rebellion was quelled in July. The situation created by the rebellion led to an increase in the size of James’ standing army and saw the employment of a number of Catholic officers in it. Legally speaking, the Test Act of 1673 allowed James to employ the Catholic officers for only up to a period of three months.<sup>298</sup> After the danger had passed with the rebellion, Halifax in his usual fashion made sure to remind the King of the questionable legality of those Catholic

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*Historical and Biographical Notes, and Fifty-One Portraits*, vol. 2, (London: William Smith, 113, Fleet Street, 1838), p. 400.

<sup>295</sup> Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 438-439.

<sup>296</sup> Reresby, *Memoirs*, p. 360.

<sup>297</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part One, p. 69; Kenyon, *Sunderland*, p. 112; Miller, *James II*, pp. 125-126.

<sup>298</sup> Miller, *James II*, p. 143.

employments. According to Burnet, sometime after the rebellion “the Marquis of Halifax did move in council, that an order should be given to examine, whether all the officers in commission had taken the test, or not.” Halifax was alone in supporting such a motion.<sup>299</sup> The King also responded by insisting that he intended to keep the Catholic officers in his employ.<sup>300</sup> This was not the first time that Halifax had spoken out against James’ conduct in government. An entry from Reresby’s diary dated a few months back in 23 April remarked that Halifax had “in two perticular and private audiences with the King, tould him his mind with that planess in relation to his service in point of government that he wondered the King (considering his temper) took it with that calmness.”<sup>301</sup> By October 1685, the King seriously doubted whether Halifax could be relied upon to support his Catholic policies. He confronted the Marquis privately and asked him whether he would support the repeal of the Test and Habeas Corpus acts in Parliament when it next sat. Halifax, who later in a letter described the acts as “the strongest bulwarks of all that is left us”, answered the King in the negative.<sup>302</sup> Upon Halifax’s refusal, James saw no reason to retain his services and promptly dismissed him.<sup>303</sup> The King, undeterred, would proceed with his aims to strengthen Catholicism in England.

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<sup>299</sup> Burnet, *History*, vol. 2, p. 418.

<sup>300</sup> Miller, *James II*, pp. 142-143.

<sup>301</sup> Reresby, *Memoirs*, p. 361.

<sup>302</sup> Halifax to Chesterfield, October 1685, in *Letters of Philip, Second Earl of Chesterfield, to several Celebrated Individuals of the time of Charles II., James II., William III., and Queen Anne, with some of their replies*, ed. [Unnamed] (London: E. Lloyd and Son, Harley Street, 1829), pp. 297, 301.

<sup>303</sup> Extract of a Letter from Barillon to Louis XIV, 29 October 1685, printed in *A Translation of the French Letters*, pp. 123-124; Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 449-451.

### Opposing James' Catholic ambitions

Though out of office, Halifax still found a role to play in opposing James' political programme. During the initial stages of James agenda, Halifax focused his efforts on securing its defeat in Parliament. His letters to his political colleague, the Earl of Chesterfield, signalled clearly the Marquis' intentions to go into opposition against James in Parliament. Before Parliament met in November 1685 he related to Chesterfield of James' intentions to repeal the Test and Habeas Corpus Acts in Parliament. Because Chesterfield intended to absent himself from the upcoming session, Halifax implored his colleague to attend so that his "friends" there "may have your countenance and assistance, if there should be occasion, in defending those bills which are the strongest bulwarks of all that is left us."<sup>304</sup> However, events would play itself out without much effort from Halifax. When Parliament reconvened on 9 November, James would alienate it by an imperious opening speech. The King insisted on keeping the employment of his Catholic officers in open defiance of the Test Act and, noting the poor performance of the militia during the Monmouth Rebellion, asked for additional funding for his standing army.<sup>305</sup> Faced with such an aggressive speech from the King, the Commons expressed several symptoms of discontent. The House made clear its displeasure with the King's intentions to keep the Catholic officers; it voted additional funding to James, but with clear reluctance and on an amount not at all according to his expectations; and rather than abandon the militia, the House resolved to make improvements to it.<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> Halifax to Chesterfield, October 1685, in *Earl of Chesterfield*, pp. 302.

<sup>305</sup> Miller, *James II*, p. 146.

<sup>306</sup> Miller, *James II*, pp. 146-147; Harris, *Revolution*, pp. 97-99.

James had made a bad start, but Halifax believed the battle would continue. As Chesterfield remained in the country as Parliament sat, Halifax wrote to him again on 10 November in another attempt to convince him to come up. Again, a clear concern about securing the defeat of the King's aims in Parliament can be seen. Accordingly, he conveyed his hope to his colleague that "wee might reserve you for some of those criticall debates upon which, to our thinking, every thing dependeth."<sup>307</sup> Halifax played his own part during the session. He aligned with the opposition and expressed his disapproval of the King's opening speech when the Lords desired to reconsider it, after having previously voted thanks for it.<sup>308</sup> Faced with the hostility of both Houses, James never came near his plan to repeal the Test Acts in Parliament. The Houses' resistance on the preliminary issues of the standing army and the employment of Catholic officers convinced the King to prorogue it on 20 November. Afterwards, he dismissed those who had opposed him in Parliament from their offices and commissions.<sup>309</sup> Parliament's resistance to James' Catholic designs would have been a relieving outcome from Halifax's point of view.

Aside from having to confront an uncooperative Parliament, James also had to deal with resistance from the Church of England. From the beginning of his reign, the King had been promoting the Catholic faith through various methods. These developments provoked resistance from the Anglican clergy who, in turn, preached against it from their pulpits and in the press.<sup>310</sup> Despite the King's attempts to put a stop to this, many of the clergy nonetheless continued those sermons. Consequently, James deemed it necessary to bring

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<sup>307</sup> Halifax to Chesterfield, 10 November 1685, in *Earl of Chesterfield*, pp. 306-307.

<sup>308</sup> Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 458-459; Harris, *Revolution*, p. 99.

<sup>309</sup> Miller, *James II*, p. 147; Harris, *Revolution*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>310</sup> Harris, *Revolution*, p. 199.

matters into his own hands. In July 1686 he established an ecclesiastical commission to bring in line and discipline the clergy and other ecclesiastical institutions such as the universities.<sup>311</sup> This was, of course, to the further discontent of James' Protestant subjects, many of whom saw the establishment of the commission as a violation of the law.<sup>312</sup> Frustrated with Parliament's lack of cooperation and the Church's resistance to his agenda, James began seeking new allies.

James was now beginning to see a potential ally in the Protestant Dissenters. The Dissenters' continued persecution by the Anglican Church has perpetuated the rift between the two groups. The King thus sought to exploit this division among his Protestant subjects and tried to bring the nonconformists to his side.<sup>313</sup> Signs of this political shift could be seen in March 1686, when James issued a general pardon for religious offences and issued a warrant that saw 1,200 Quakers freed over the next six months.<sup>314</sup> Over the course of the year, James' gestures towards the Dissenters expanded. He became willing to grant them dispensations from the penal laws if they petitioned for relief.<sup>315</sup> By the end of 1686, James had abandoned his alliance with the Tory-Anglican interests and he was dismissing from office any who would not full-heartedly support his Catholic policies.<sup>316</sup> The King's next step was to issue his dispensations in a sweeping and wholesale fashion. In April 1687, the King issued his Declaration of Indulgence that effectively suspended the penal laws and the Test

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<sup>311</sup> Miller, *James II*, p. 154.

<sup>312</sup> Harris, *Revolution*, pp. 204-205.

<sup>313</sup> Lacey, *Dissent*, pp. 176-177.

<sup>314</sup> Harris, *Revolution*, p. 206.

<sup>315</sup> Miller, *Popery and Politics*, pp. 210-212.

<sup>316</sup> Miller, *James II*, p. 164.

Act of 1673.<sup>317</sup> Through this sweeping declaration, James was hoping that all but the most hostile Anglicans would see the benefit of religious liberty and expected addresses of thanks from his subjects.<sup>318</sup> James followed this declaration with the dissolution of his Parliament in July. He and his government were hoping that the Declaration would garner enough support from the Dissenters to turn in a compliant parliament next time James summoned one.<sup>319</sup>

Halifax made his next move at this juncture. The arena was no longer the debating chambers of Parliament, but in the sphere of public opinion. The Dissenters needed to be dissuaded from trusting James' offers of relief in exchange for support. Appropriately, he penned a propaganda piece at this time entitled *A Letter to a Dissenter*, which he published anonymously in September 1687.<sup>320</sup> Halifax's *Letter to a Dissenter* essentially tried to convince the Dissenters that it was prudent and in their best interests not to rely on James for permanent relief from persecution. In making his case against James, Halifax attempted to sow distrust in the Catholic party's sincerity towards the Dissenters. He argued that James and his co-religionists' sudden change of heart should be suspected, especially given the Catholic faith's animosities. As Halifax remarked, "the other day you were *Sons of Belial*, now you are *Angels of light*". Given this sudden and extreme change, "it will be fit for you to pause upon it, before you believe it: If your features are not altered, neither is their opinion of you, what ever may be pretended."<sup>321</sup> Furthermore, by supporting James and his

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<sup>317</sup> Miller, *Popery and Politics* p. 215.

<sup>318</sup> Miller, *James II*, pp. 165-166; Harris, *Revolution*, p. 216.

<sup>319</sup> Kenyon, *Sunderland*, pp. 157-158.

<sup>320</sup> The timing of this pamphlet's appearance is touched on by Brown. See Brown, Introduction to Part One, pp. 75-76.

<sup>321</sup> George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, "A Letter to a Dissenter, upon Occasion of His Majesties Late Gracious Declaration of Indulgence," in *The Works of George Savile, Marquis of Halifax*, ed. Mark N. Brown, vol. 1, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 252.

Declaration, the Dissenters would be forfeiting any protection from the laws and putting themselves at the mercy of the King's personal prerogative. "After giving Thanks for the breach of one Law, you lose the Right of Complaining of the breach of all the rest; you will not very well know how to defend your selves, when you are pressed."<sup>322</sup> Rather than relying on James' dubious support, the Dissenters would benefit more by waiting for the next reign. He reassured them that the established church was now "convinced of its Errour in being Severe to you" and that the next likely inheritors of the throne, Princess Mary and her husband William of Orange, would be more likely to grant them real tangible relief from persecution. Given these considerations, it was best to lay under religious persecution a little longer until the next reign, when better days were to come.<sup>323</sup>

In frustrating James' goals through Parliament and public opinion, Halifax's strategy throughout this period was essentially that of promoting national noncompliance. He firmly believed that James could make no progress as long as the Protestant majority of the nation resisted. This belief was expressed very early on in 1685 when he wrote to Chesterfield about James' intentions of repealing the Test Acts in Parliament. He noted to his correspondent that several lords as well as elements in the court, the House of Commons and the army were against the repeal of the Test Acts. With this information at hand, Halifax surmised to his colleague "either, that upon sounding men, they will be so discouraged as not to attempt these things; or, if they doe, that they will fayle them."<sup>324</sup> As the situation developed and James pursued his policies more aggressively, Halifax continued to believe

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid., p. 257.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., pp. 262-263.

<sup>324</sup> Halifax to Chesterfield, Oct 1685, in *Earl of Chesterfield*, pp. 297-300.

that the King's progress could be checked as long as the nation rejected those policies. In January 1687, Halifax wrote to William, that "though there appeareth the utmost vigour to pursue the design which hath been so long laid, there seemeth to be no less firmness in the nation, and aversion to change".<sup>325</sup> Four months after James' Declaration, Halifax elaborated in stronger terms on the disadvantageous ground James now stood upon. "There are some things that can never prevail upon men's minds, if they have time allowed to consider them; this may be the present case, the whole kingdom being now so well-informed, that all men are settled in their dislike of the unwelcome thing that is endeavoured to be imposed on them."<sup>326</sup> As can be seen, Halifax harboured a strong belief that James' Catholic programme could be checked by the strong discontent it has provoked.

Such a belief, furthermore, was entirely characteristic of Halifax upon examination of his aphorisms. The previous chapter has shown Halifax's deep awareness that there was a distinction between the theoretical and practical bounds of government authority. Authority had to be supported by material forces, such as the compliance of the people, rather than relying solely on fundamental ideas about what should and should not be. Expressed in another way, this view meant that a government's authority depended upon the goodwill of its people. Similar to his thoughts about the limits of government authority, this corresponding view was likewise expressed in Halifax's aphorisms. As he wrote in one example, "the Heart of the Subjects yieldeth but a lean Crop where it is not cultivated by a

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<sup>325</sup> Halifax to William of Orange, 18 January 1686/7 in Sir John Dalrymple, appendix to book 5 of part 1 to *Memoirs of Great Britain and Ireland; from the Dissolution of the last Parliament of Charles II. Till the Capture of the French and Spanish Fleets at Vigo*, vol. 2, (London: Printed for A. Strahan, 1790), pp. 57-58.

<sup>326</sup> Halifax to William of Orange, 25 August 1687 in *ibid.*, p. 82.



wise Prince. The Good-will of the Governed will be starved, if it is not fed by the good Conduct of the Governors.”<sup>327</sup> By making the metaphorical connection between public goodwill and crop yield, Halifax made the suggestion that discontent towards government was as detrimental as the effects of experiencing a low crop yield. Another aphorism similarly reflected that “where a Prince is not proud of making his people happy, the people will not bee proud of making him Great.”<sup>328</sup> Here, again, there is an implicit acknowledgement that the people play a role in making their prince successful, and that they would cease to play that role if their prince showed that he cared not for his people’s happiness.

Following from these notions, Halifax was aware that a separation between a monarch and its people could only detriment the former. As he wrote in another aphorism, “a Separation of interests between the Prince and his people, is so farre from exalting his prerogative, that it destroyeth the foundation of his ordinary power.”<sup>329</sup> Far from being unaffected by national discontent, a prince’s practical authority was greatly hampered when unsupported by the people, which formed “the foundation of his ordinary power.” This separation of interest was the situation that Halifax found the nation in at this current juncture. James was claiming his prerogative to dispense with the penal laws and Test Act and was effectively using his position as King to pursue an interest separate from the majority of his nation. Halifax’s confidence that a national noncompliance was sufficient to frustrate James’ Catholic policies resonated with his acknowledgements that government

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<sup>327</sup> Halifax, “Political Thoughts,” p. 226: 27-29.

<sup>328</sup> Halifax, “Miscellaneous Maxims,” p. 414: 29-30.

<sup>329</sup> Halifax, “Prerogative,” p. 53: 13-15.

authority was limited in practice and that its practical effectiveness depended on the people.

Halifax's *Letter to a Dissenter* provoked at least eight replies, some of which came from James' government.<sup>330</sup> However, the pamphlet's real impact remains unclear.<sup>331</sup> What is clear is that James continued to face setbacks to his political programme. In the first place, contemporary reactions to James' Declaration were not very warm. Many saw it as an abuse of the royal prerogative and criticised it as such.<sup>332</sup> The Anglican clergy were unsurprisingly displeased and a notable number of them refused to take part in the addresses of thanks for the Declaration.<sup>333</sup> There was uncertainty about how to react even among the various Protestant sects, who, along with the Catholics, would have benefitted most from James' act.<sup>334</sup> The King was also facing set back in another project. The government's expectations of favourable Dissenter support in the next parliament were dashed as the responses began to come in.<sup>335</sup> From August onwards, James began his campaign to sack the next parliament with those amenable to his goals. These efforts, however, were met with frequent frustrations as many involved were reluctant to aid the King in this endeavour.<sup>336</sup> By March 1688, it was clear that James did not have the support needed, even from the Protestant Dissenters, to obtain the compliant parliament he desired.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part One, pp. 95-96.

<sup>331</sup> Harris, *Revolution*, pp. 255-256; Lacey, *Dissent*, pp.187-188.

<sup>332</sup> Harris, *Revolution*, pp. 213-214.

<sup>333</sup> Harris, *Revolution*, pp. 219-221.

<sup>334</sup> Harris, *Revolution*, pp. 217-219; Lacey, *Dissent*, pp. 184-186; Miller, *James II*, pp. 171-172.

<sup>335</sup> Kenyon, *Sunderland*, p. 159.

<sup>336</sup> Kenyon, *Sunderland*, pp. 161-162, 171-174, 187-190; Harris, *Revolution*, pp. 230-233.

<sup>337</sup> Kenyon, *Sunderland*, pp. 191-192.

Frustrated with the lack of progress, James reiterated his goals in his second Declaration of Indulgence on 27 April.<sup>338</sup> This second Declaration was in essence a restatement of the first Declaration, except for its added emphasis on Parliament's role in legally confirming religious liberty. This added emphasis, Douglas R. Lacey posited, was calculated to reassure the Dissenters that legal means would be used to establish permanent religious liberty if only they would give support to him.<sup>339</sup> James followed this second Declaration by ordering it to be read throughout the churches. If followed, this would have given an appearance of endorsement from the Church leaders.<sup>340</sup> This directive was to have disastrous consequences for the King.

### Avoiding drastic actions

As the situation developed, Halifax remained firm on his strategy of passive resistance. In doing this he deliberately maintained a cautious line of conduct. This was in contrast to a more direct solution that was being suggested by early 1688. This was the idea of inviting William of Orange's direct intervention in English affairs.<sup>341</sup> William indeed was a natural candidate to seek aid from. He had a natural stake in the development of the situation in England since his wife stood next in line to the throne should James die childless. More specifically, the Prince had deep forebodings that either James would eventually disinherit his wife's claim to the throne or that his unpopular rule would spark a

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<sup>338</sup> Miller, *James II*, p. 182.

<sup>339</sup> Lacey, *Dissent*, pp. 209-210.

<sup>340</sup> Harris, *Revolution*, p. 259; Miller, *James II*, p. 182.

<sup>341</sup> Burnet, *History*, vol. 2, pp. 484-486.

rebellion that would similarly leave Princess Mary's claim uncertain.<sup>342</sup> Such concerns only increased in prominence as relations between William and James worsened and as rumours about the Queen's pregnancy reached the former.<sup>343</sup> As for Halifax's own position, he coldly rejected the idea of expediting the situation by a foreign intervention. According to Burnet, when Halifax was asked "if he would advise the prince's coming over... he looked on the thing as impracticable; it depended on so many accidents, that he thought it was a rash and desperate project, that ventured all upon such a dangerous issue, as might turn on seas and winds."<sup>344</sup>

Halifax's clear aversion to any direct courses of action was natural given his views by 1688. By this time, he saw that James' position was becoming increasingly precarious in the face of national discontent. Under such circumstances hasty and rash actions to speed up what seemed like an eventual collapse could easily backfire in favour of James. This position was conveyed in a significant letter in April. In the lengthy letter, Halifax commented to William that the strong opposition to James' programme has driven the King and his accomplices into an indecisive and divided state. Such a situation he believed, "will produce great effects, if men will let it work." On the other hand, what would spoil matters now were "unseasonable stirrings, or anything that looketh like the Protestants being the Aggressors". As such, Halifax was deeply apprehensive towards individuals who were animated by an excited eagerness to expedite the situation at this critical juncture.

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<sup>342</sup> Miller, *James II*, p. 133.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., pp. 184-185.

<sup>344</sup> Burnet, *History*, vol. 2, p. 485. A similar account was given in Burnet's manuscripts. Cf. Burnet, *Supplement*, p. 291.

“Nothing, therefore, in the present conjuncture can be more dangerous than unskilful agitators, warm men, who would be active at a wrong time, and want patience to keep their zeal from running away with them.”<sup>345</sup> As can be seen here, Halifax deliberately maintained a cautious attitude to the developing situation, even as James’ position became increasingly weak.

Halifax’s cautiousness corresponded well with the attitudes in his aphorisms. He was deeply self-conscious that one’s exercise of reason can suddenly be extinguished by yielding to sudden impulses. He saw in the human will, an internal struggle for control between reason and nature. “That warr which never yet had a truce, between our reason and our passions, will be eternal. And from the moment we let our reason sleep we are surprised.”<sup>346</sup> A similar idea was expressed in another aphorism. “Humor and reason have been ever at cuffs, and the first has generally so prevailed, that it is a wonder the other has escaped with beating, and that it has not been murdered.”<sup>347</sup> Between human nature and reason, Halifax knew which of the two often prevailed. His tendency to see human beings as more dominated by their nature than reason has already been touched on in chapter three. One important implication of this outlook was that the influence of human nature often led one to irrational and self-destructive actions. Glimpses into some of his aphorisms bear this out clearly. Anger, for instance, “makes men distinguish ill, and take up arguments which burn their fingers”; an overbearing ambition has the tendency to lull individuals to their own

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<sup>345</sup> Halifax to William of Orange, 12 April 1688, in Dalrymple appendix to book 5 of part 1 to *Memoirs of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 2, pp. 96-97.

<sup>346</sup> Halifax, “Miscellanys,” p. 240: 20-22.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241: 31-33.

ruin since, “men’s thoughts once applied to what they desire, are apt to stick there, without considering what they ought to fear”; and the generality of humanity often ignore their reason because “the world is too proud to meet reason half way; it will not rise up to it.”<sup>348</sup> Moreover, when one is under the influence of a sudden passion, it was difficult to shake it off. As one aphorism reflected, “when a passion once gets astride of us, it is not easy to dismount it... The same reason that was too weak to hinder it to get up, will bee too weak to get it down again.”<sup>349</sup> Halifax was, therefore, deeply self-conscious of the many elements in human nature that were disruptive to humanity’s capacity to act reasonably and rationally.

This awareness extended to Halifax’s ideas about eagerness, as his aphorisms warned against yielding too much to it. As one aphorism said, “too much eagerness frights the thing we have a mind to catch. It makes it run away from us. Good fortune will not be taken by storm; there must be warmth, but it must not be too violent.”<sup>350</sup> Halifax was aware that the violent “warmth” of individuals, represented in excessive eagerness, was likely to extinguish one’s discretion and caution. As he wrote in another aphorism, “Heat of bloud hath an aversion to Mediocrity; It will be blazing, and is impatient to hear the cool advice of discretion.”<sup>351</sup> It was good to be inspired by a little eagerness to offset one’s timidity, but one needed to avoid an excess in both by moderating between the two. “Heat Scorneth moderation, as Phlegme feareth aspiring; they must bee joined, but it must bee by a skilfull hand, or else they are both the worse for being mingled.”<sup>352</sup> To Halifax, yielding too much to

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<sup>348</sup> Halifax, “Miscellanys,” p. 43: 26-27: 8-9; Halifax, “Miscellaneous Maxims,” p. 421: 29-30.

<sup>349</sup> Halifax, “Miscellaneous Maxims,” p. 404: 29-32.

<sup>350</sup> Halifax, “Miscellanys,” p. 101: 12-14.

<sup>351</sup> Halifax, “Miscellaneous Maxims,” pp. 366-367: 31-1.

<sup>352</sup> Halifax, “Miscellaneous Maxims,” p. 367: 1-4.

that “heat” or “warmth” associated with eagerness carried that same danger of having one’s reason suspended, much in the same way that being under the influence of a sudden impulse or passion did. It has that same potential to lead to irrational actions and detrimental outcomes for the individual and their affairs; specifically with eagerness, it “frights the thing we have a mind to catch.” Halifax was, in other words, self-conscious of the consequences of yielding too much to one’s eagerness.

Given this self-conscious attitude, it was characteristic that Halifax would tend to avoid any drastic actions. At a time when he believed that the slightest misstep might prove advantageous to James’ government, it was consistent of the Marquis that he would warn against any drastically direct actions. Such actions might not be informed by rational decision making. It was apt that he would warn William against taking the advice of “warm men who would bee active at a wrong time, and want patience to keep their zeale from running away with them”. Such individuals in their eagerness to alleviate the current situation were not guided by reason, but by impulse or their “zele”. Halifax knew well in his aphorisms the danger of yielding to human impulses, so that his aversion to these individuals and their methods was consistent with those attitudes shown in his short pieces. Unfortunately for Halifax, his efforts to promote a purely defensive and non-violent resistance to James’ Catholic policies were in vain. Events would take an unexpected and radical turn.

## The coming storm

James' directive to have his second Declaration of Indulgence read out by the clergy would prove to be a disaster. Seven bishops, among many others, refused to comply, and James committed those bishops to the tower. The subsequent Trial of the Seven Bishops served as a spectacular defeat for James when the jury found them not guilty of their indictment to undermine the authority of the Crown and government. Celebrations cropped up around the country on this occasion.<sup>353</sup> Halifax was at the fore of those celebrations, if a contemporary account is to be believed. Early-Whig historian John Oldmixon described the scene at the bishop's acquittals in the following way. "The court sate the next day, and then the Jury came in with their Verdict Not guilty. Upon which the Marquis of *Halifax* waving his Hat over his Head, cry'd Huzzah! The Lords and Gentlemen took the shout from him."<sup>354</sup> Halifax did have good reason to rejoice. The acquittals not only served as a defeat in James' campaign to control the Tory-Anglican interests, but it also had the effect of further unifying the Protestant majority of the nation against the King's Catholic policies. "The late business concerning the bishops hath had such an effect, that it is hardly to bee imagined", wrote Halifax to William; "I look upon it as that which hath brought all the Protestants together, and bound them up into a knot, that cannot be easily be untied."<sup>355</sup> To William, Halifax also reiterated his optimistic diagnosis of the situation. "I still remain persuaded that there is no effectual progress made towards the great design; and even the thing that party relieth upon [the birth of the Prince of Wales], is subject to so many accidents and uncertainties,

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<sup>353</sup> Harris, *Revolution*, pp. 267-268.

<sup>354</sup> John Oldmixon, *History of England during the Reigns of the Royal House of Stuart. Wherein the Errors of the Late Histories are Discover'd and Corrected* (London: Printed for J. Pemberton, in Fleetstreet, 1730), p. 739.

<sup>355</sup> Halifax to the Prince of Orange, 25 July 1688, in Dalrymple, appendix to book 5 of part 1 to *The Memoirs of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 2, p. 116.



that according to human probability we are secure”.<sup>356</sup> The spectacular affair of the bishops’ acquittal was for Halifax the ideal outcome he had been hoping for ever since James began pursuing his policies.

Halifax would continue his strategy of mobilising public opinion against James’ Catholic designs. In the spring of 1688, Halifax penned his *Anatomy of an Equivalent* to continue the struggle on the public front. It was written amidst public discussions about certain securities or “equivalents” that would be offered in exchange for the repeal of the Test Acts, in whole or part. For James and his government, this new strategy of offering “equivalents” was to allay fears that the Protestant religion would be subverted if any part of the Tests were repealed. Similar in purpose to his *Letter to a Dissenter*, Halifax’s *Anatomy* sought to warn his fellow English against trusting this offer of these equivalent securities.<sup>357</sup>

However, as the Marquis was penning his *Anatomy*, William of Orange was, in fact, making preparations to militarily intervene in England. He was explicitly invited to do so by seven Englishmen, who signed and sent the invitation to the Prince of Orange on the day on which the seven bishops were acquitted.<sup>358</sup> Despite Halifax’s previous exhortations to William about avoiding any drastic actions, he was ultimately unsuccessful in dissuading the

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<sup>356</sup> Halifax to the Prince of Orange, 25 July 1688, in *ibid.*, p. 117. Foxcroft believed that Halifax was alluding to the Prince of Wales when he wrote “the thing that party relieth upon”, since there was a widespread belief that the Prince would not survive into adulthood if born. See, Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 500, 510 n2.

<sup>357</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part One, pp. 99-109.

<sup>358</sup> The men were the Earls of Shrewsbury, Devonshire and Danby, Viscount Lumley, the Bishop of London, Edward Russel and Henry Sydney.

Prince. Accordingly, William in the end deemed it necessary to take matters into his own hands.

## **Chapter 7 – The Glorious Revolution**

Halifax initially sided with James during William's expedition against the King. However, when James was effectively deposed and William was declared the new King, it was the Marquis who formally presented the crowns to the conqueror and his wife. This chapter focuses on Halifax's actions to support William's bid for the throne. Halifax initially showed some willingness to help James expedite the situation in his favour, but he defected over to William after the King's first attempt to flee the country. Halifax would vigorously support William's claim to the crown during the Convention Parliament which met in January 1689. This chapter will suggest that Halifax was adhering to the necessities of the moment in supporting William. As will be shown, Halifax was well aware that the Prince intended to let the existing power vacuum continue if he was not given the crown. The Marquis would subsequently argue in Parliament that it was a matter of necessity that William fill the vacant throne. Halifax's pragmatic approach was unlike that of his Tory colleagues, who would not support the Prince's claim out of constitutional scruples. As will be seen, Halifax's adherence to the necessities of the moment rather than constitutional principles was entirely in keeping with his aphorisms. As part of his sceptical outlook of human ideas, he did not believe that any law or constitution was so fundamental that it could stand the test of time and remain applicable forever. For Halifax, it was a mistake to adhere strictly to human ideas and what mattered was the ability to adapt as dictated by the prevailing circumstances.

## The developments leading to the Convention Parliament

Halifax briefly aided James during William's invasion. The situation for the King was precarious. Ever since William landed at Torbay in early November 1688, news frequently came to James of desertions from his army as well as revolts in other parts of the country. On 27 November he assembled all of the peers who were present in the capital for advice.<sup>359</sup> Halifax was among those attended. During this meeting, James settled on calling a free parliament as a first step to expediting the situation.<sup>360</sup> In order to ensure that William did not undertake any further actions to worsen James' position as Parliament assembled and sat, the King also sent Halifax as one of three commissioners to negotiate with the Prince and to obtain his concurrence for the free Parliament.<sup>361</sup> There is evidence to suggest that Halifax may not have been serving James in good faith, though Foxcroft disagrees with the inferences drawn from that evidence.<sup>362</sup> However, the King's subsequent actions would prevent Halifax's true motivations, whatever they were, from fully playing out. The reports coming from the commissioners were indicating to James that William was unlikely to halt his march upon the capital. At this juncture, James decided it was time to extract himself from the situation. In the early hours of 11 December, as Halifax and the other commissioners were still engaged in their task, the King stole away from the capital with the intention of fleeing to France.<sup>363</sup> Halifax returned to the capital from his commission not

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<sup>359</sup> Miller, *James II*, pp. 202-205; Harris, *Revolution*, pp. 293-295.

<sup>360</sup> David Lewis Jones, *A Parliamentary History of the Glorious Revolution* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1988), p. 4; Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 14-17.

<sup>361</sup> George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, et al., *The Commissioners Proposals to His Royal Highness the Prince of Orange with his Highness' Answer* (London, Printed for R. Bentley in Russel-Street, 1688), p. 1; Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 17-19; Miller, *James II*, pp. 205.

<sup>362</sup> Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 20-22, 27 n4.

<sup>363</sup> Miller, *James II*, p. 205.

long after James' flight.<sup>364</sup> Whatever his inclinations towards helping the King were, the absence of authority and the further anarchy which ensued gave all the plausible reasons for a defection to William.<sup>365</sup> Halifax would thereafter commit himself to the interests of the Prince.

A provisional government was formed among several lords and bishops almost immediately after James' flight. Upon his return, Halifax joined his colleagues and chaired their meetings. The first priority of the lords was to restore peace and order within the city.<sup>366</sup> In addition to these developments, news came that James' retreat to France was foiled and that the King was apprehended by the people of Faversham.<sup>367</sup> He was accompanied back to London on 16 December, but was afterwards brought to Rochester upon suggestions from William's side that he be removed from the capital. Here, James made his second, and successful, escape from the country on 23 December and arrived in France on Christmas morning.<sup>368</sup> In the capital, as civil unrest was in the process of being brought back under control, attention now turned to the state of the nation at large. William had left the lords and an assembly of former MPs during Charles II's reign to deliberate amongst themselves how best to bring about a free parliament. Accordingly, the lords and former MPs addressed the Prince to issue writs for an election of a convention

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<sup>364</sup> Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol.2, p. 33; Jones, *Parliamentary History*, p. 7. Foxcroft claimed that the commissioners returned on the same day of the flight, whereas Jones wrote it was the day after.

<sup>365</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part One, p. 111. On the further anarchy which ensued after James' flight, see Harris, *Revolution*, pp. 296-299.

<sup>366</sup> Jones, *Parliamentary History*, pp. 7-9; Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 34-35.

<sup>367</sup> Miller, *James II*, pp. 206-207; Jones, *Parliamentary History*, p. 8.

<sup>368</sup> Miller, *James II*, pp. 208-209; Jones, *Parliamentary History*, p. 9; Harris, *Revolution*, p. 305.

parliament and also asked him to temporarily assume the responsibilities of government.<sup>369</sup>

William duly agreed to these proposals.

Even before the Convention Parliament met in January 1689, separate political groupings had begun to develop. Numerous outcomes to the current situation were possible at this stage and people gravitated towards the different solutions according to their political inclinations. Though there was a group of “commonwealthmen” who advocated for far-reaching constitutional reforms, the solutions generally converged upon two camps; one which supported retaining and preserving the right line of succession, and the other for William to take the English throne. Those in the first camp were inclined for a regency, or at the least securing the line of succession by having Princess Mary succeed her father, and those in the second camp would want William to take the crown either jointly with Mary or as sole monarch.<sup>370</sup>

For Halifax, his own inclinations seemed predetermined by a critical piece of information he had. In a journal notebook, he made note of a private conversation he had with William on the 30<sup>th</sup> of December. The entry remarked that William had reflected severely upon the commonwealth faction, saying that “hee did not come over to establish a Commonwealth.” The Prince’s intentions were revealed more explicitly as he confided to Halifax that “hee would not stay in England, if K. James came again” and that “hee said with

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<sup>369</sup> Jones, *Parliamentary History*, pp. 9-12; Harris, *Revolution*, pp. 312-313.

<sup>370</sup> Jones, *Parliamentary History*, pp. 13-16; Harris, *Revolution*, pp. 313-319.

the strongest asseverations, that hee would go, if they went about to make him Regent.”<sup>371</sup>

William’s intentions severely limited the number of viable solutions, as neither a regency nor the crown landing solely on Mary would satisfy him. Effectively, the line of succession had to be breached in one way or another if England hoped to retain William’s continual support and presence in the current situation. Halifax, who, as Brown noted, saw William’s cause as a “bulwark against a possible Jacobite despotism established by the armed might of France”, was well aware which side needed to prevail even before the Convention Parliament met on 22 January.<sup>372</sup>

### Supporting William’s bid for the throne

The Convention met on the appointed day of the 22<sup>nd</sup>, but it was not until the 29<sup>th</sup> that the Lords began its discussion on the state of the nation. After voting to agree with the Commons that a Popish prince was inconsistent with the government of England, they turned their attention to the issue of the empty throne and its absent King. A motion was brought in by the Bishop of Ely to resolve the situation through a regency, whereby James would still be king by law but not in practice.<sup>373</sup> Constitutional consistency was among the main concern for these Tories. According to Danby’s fragmentary notes on the debate, The Earl of Nottingham argued that it was not possible that a king could forfeit his inheritance and under the present circumstances a regency was the remedy that was most in line with

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<sup>371</sup> George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, “Spencer House ‘Journals’,” in H. C. Foxcroft, *The Life and Letters of Sir George Savile, Bart. First Marquis of Halifax &c.*, ed. H. C. Foxcroft, vol. 2, (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1898; New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), pp. 203-204.

<sup>372</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part One, p. 111. Foxcroft attaches a similar motivation to Halifax at this critical juncture. See Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 50-51.

<sup>373</sup> Harris, *Revolution*, pp. 324-325; Jones, *Parliamentary History*, pp. 22.

the law.<sup>374</sup> The Earl of Rochester argued that if the throne was declared vacant, England would effectively become an elective monarchy and urged for a regency to avoid this extremity.<sup>375</sup> Halifax, on the other hand, was suggested as arguing that a regency opened the way for James' full restoration as he remarked that there have been instances in which princes have returned to government under similar arrangements.<sup>376</sup> The regency scheme was defeated by a division of 51 to 49, with Halifax voting against the measure.<sup>377</sup> Having finished debating on a regency, the Lords turned their attention to the Commons' crucial vote about the vacancy of the throne.

The crucial vote now in question was resolved by the Commons on the 28<sup>th</sup> and read that,

King *James* the Second, having endeavoured to subvert the Constitution of this Kingdom, by breaking the Original Contract between King and People; and, by the Advice of Jesuits, and other wicked Persons, having violated the fundamental Laws;

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<sup>374</sup> See the notes on the Lords' debate on 29 January 1688/89 written in the Earl of Danby's hand, printed in "Parliament and the Glorious Revolution," by Henry Horwitz, *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* vol. 47 (1974): pp. 50-51, 52.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 52.

<sup>377</sup> Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 2, p. 49; Jones, *Parliamentary History*, pp. 22-23. Contemporary diarist Roger Morrice noted that Halifax supported the regency scheme. Halifax, however, was not listed as a supporter for regency in the division list attached to the Earl of Clarendon's diary. Clarendon himself strongly supported a regency during the actual debate. See, Roger Morrice, *The Entering Book of Roger Morrice 1677-1691*, ed. Stephen Taylor, vol. 4, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press in association with The Parliamentary History Yearbook Trust, 2007), pp. 503-504; Henry Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, "Diary of Henry Earl of Clarendon," in *The Correspondence of Henry Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, and his brother Laurence Hyde, Earl of Rochester; with the diary of Lord Clarendon from 1687 to 1690*, ed. Samuel Weller Singer, vol. 2, (London: Henry Colburn, New Burlington Street, 1828), p. 256.



and having withdrawn himself out of this Kingdom; has abdicated the Government;  
and that the Throne is thereby vacant.<sup>378</sup>

As with the regency scheme, there was much disagreement about the Common's vacancy vote among the various lords. They agreed that James had broken the original contract with the people, but encountered issues over the word "abdicated" and also with the clause "the Throne is thereby become vacant." Accordingly, the Lords voted that "abdicated" be changed to "deserted" and that the vacancy clause be struck out of the resolution entirely. The amendments were subsequently sent down to the Commons the next day for its consideration.<sup>379</sup>

Similar to the motivations for the regency scheme, the Lords' non-concurrence on the vacancy vote was animated by a desire to preserve strictly the line of succession and ensure constitutional consistency. It was explained in a free conference on 6 February that the Lords were uneasy with the "vacancy" because they intended that the crown was only ceased in the person of James himself and that it was impossible that his lawful successors were consequently barred from it. As the Earl of Clarendon argued, "no Act of the King's alone can Bar or Destroy the Right of his Heir to the Crown, which is Hereditary, and not Elective."<sup>380</sup> By removing the vacancy clause, the Lords explained that there was in fact no vacancy to fill, since the crown would automatically fall on the next successor after James' civil demise. The Earl of Pembroke argued that "I think it is sufficient to know that there are

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<sup>378</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, vol. 10, (Re-printed by order of the House of Commons, 1803), p. 14.

<sup>379</sup> Jones, *Parliamentary History*, pp. 24-26, 28.

<sup>380</sup> Earl of Clarendon's speech, in *The Debate at Large, Between the Lords and Commons, at the Free Conference, Held in the Painted Chamber* (London: Printed and Sold by John Morphew, 1710), p. 19.

Heirs who are to take the Lineal Succession, though we do not, or cannot positively name the particular person; and therefore we may well conclude there is no Vacancy.”<sup>381</sup> As the Lords explained their disagreement with the Commons, it was clear some were immovably attached to the preservation of constitutional law. Nottingham feared that by declaring the throne vacant, England might become an elective monarchy. For him, the constitutional obligation to uphold the hereditary succession “is Reason enough for my Lords to disagree to it [the suggestion of vacancy], it bringing in the Danger of a Breach upon the Constitution”.<sup>382</sup> Clarendon likewise invoked constitutional law in his defence for the hereditary succession, asserting that “by all the Laws we have now in Being, our Government appears to be Hereditary in a Right line of Descent”.<sup>383</sup> Pembroke pointed out the constitutional obligations of every Englishman under law. “The Laws made are certainly part of the *Original Contract*; and by the Laws made, which establish the Oath of Allegiance and Supremacy, we are ty’d up to keep in the Hereditary Line, being Sworn to be true and faithful to the King, his Heirs and Successors.”<sup>384</sup>

Halifax supported the Commons and their vacancy clause.<sup>385</sup> Specifically, he argued for William to fill the apparent vacancy and urged his colleagues to acknowledge the extraordinary nature of the situation. Contemporary diarist Roger Morrice recorded that on 31 January Halifax, “immediately after a suitable preamble of the necessity of filling the

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<sup>381</sup> Earl of Pembroke’s speech, in *ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>382</sup> Earl of Nottingham’s speech in, *ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>383</sup> Clarendon’s speech, in *ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>384</sup> Pembroke’s speech, in *ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>385</sup> Halifax entered a formal protest against the Lords’ non-concurrence with the Commons’ vacancy clause. See, *Journals of the House of Lords*, vol. 14, p. 113.

Throne because there could be no Legall Process, nor no authoritative acts done he moved that the Prince of Orange might be Crowned, pressing it with many reasons".<sup>386</sup> Halifax's emphasis on necessity over constitutional principles was characteristic in the context of his aphorisms. Chapter four has touched on his belief that no human fundamentals were immutable and that it was politically dangerous to identify oneself with the infallibility of those mistaken fundamentals. For Halifax, there was an additional reason why worshipping those ideas was considered folly: it was impractical to do so. Because those notions were not fundamental in its true sense, they were not applicable at all times. Such notions might do more harm than good under certain circumstances. This was the case for fundamental laws and constitutions as well. As one aphorism expressed,

The Law hateth perpetuities; so doth Naturall Reason too. There is hardly one proposition of reason that is in it selfe immortall. The same thing that in the first institution could not admitt a word to bee said in opposition, may in processe of time and change of Circumstances, become destructive.<sup>387</sup>

Similarly, another aphorism reflected that a constitution "is alterable; and by that draweth nearer Perfection; and without suiting itself to differing Times and Circumstances, it could not live. It's Life is prolonged by changing seasonably the several Parts of it at several times."<sup>388</sup> Here, Halifax conveyed his belief that a fixed constitution was not immortal and that it was a mistake to take it as such. From his point of view, a constitution "could not live" if it did not suit itself to "differing Times and Circumstances". Only by accepting that a

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<sup>386</sup> Morrice, *Entring Book*, vol. 4, p. 507. There is good reason to trust Morrice's account in this instance. It was in line with Halifax's consistent voting for William to be crowned and agreeing with the Commons' resolution that James had abdicated. See the division lists of votes on offer of the Crown published in Eveline Cruickshanks, David Hayton and Clyve Jones, "Divisions in the House of Lords on the Transfer of the Crown and Other Issues, 1689-94: Ten New Lists," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* vol. 53 (1980): p. 83.

<sup>387</sup> Halifax, "Fundamentalls," p. 137: 22-26.

<sup>388</sup> Halifax, "Political Thoughts," p. 222: 13-16.

constitution was not immoveable can its life be “prolonged by changing seasonably the several Parts of it at several times.” Both these aphorisms convey Halifax’s sceptical views that no abstract law or notions about constitutions could stand the test of time so that it would be applicable forever. For Halifax, it was imprudent when individuals refuse to acknowledge this fallibility in fundamental ideas and blindly adhere to them.

Action should not be governed by a strict internal devotion to preconceived ideas; rather, it should be dictated by a consideration of the external circumstances. Halifax expressed this vividly in one aphorism,

*Salus Populi* is the greatest of all Fundamentals, yet not altogether an immoveable one. It is a Fundamental for a Ship to ride at Anchor when it is in Port, but if a Storm cometh the Cable must be cut.<sup>389</sup>

Here, Halifax acknowledged that fundamental ideas, because they fail to comprehend all possible scenarios, should be better seen as guides for best practice rather than immoveable rules; that a ship should anchor at port is considered best practice, but it should not be followed regardless of circumstances. Considerations of the prevailing situation, such as the coming of a storm, ultimately dictated conduct. Another aphorism conveyed this same notion of prioritising circumstances over devotion to ideals. As Halifax wrote,

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<sup>389</sup> Halifax, “Political Thoughts,” p. 224: 1-4.

Some would define a Fundamental to be the settling the Laws of Nature and common Equity in such a sort as that they may be well administered: even in this case there can be nothing *fixed*, but it must *vary* for the Good of the Whole.<sup>390</sup>

For the Marquis there was a general wisdom in the adhering to the circumstances of the moment. “As the truest definition of the greatest beauty is that of the woman we love, so the least faulty definition of what is wisest, is that which is most seasonable at that time.”<sup>391</sup> Carrying this thoughtful and pragmatic mentality may be considered the closest thing to a fundamental in politics. As Halifax wrote in another aphorism, “to do what is best for the time (with a due regard to the Consequences) may bee called the fundamentall of the wiser part of Mankind”.<sup>392</sup>

Such a sceptical and pragmatic mentality was fully consistent with Halifax’s vigorous support for William at this time. He knew full well that William would abandon England to its own fate if he were not made king one way or another. Halifax fully accepted the realities imposed by such circumstances. He alluded to this when he confided to Reresby at this time that “he was not privy to this design of the Prince his coming at the first; but now that he was here, and upon soe good an occasion, we were obliged to defend him.”<sup>393</sup> Halifax’s emphasis on the necessities of the moment and his willingness to suspend constitutional considerations were consistent with his character as shown in the aphorisms above. It was a

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<sup>390</sup> Ibid., p. 222: 8-11.

<sup>391</sup> Halifax, “Miscellanys,” p. 255: 5-7.

<sup>392</sup> Halifax, “Fundamentalls,” pp. 138-139: 30-1.

<sup>393</sup> Reresby, *Memoirs*, p. 547.

mentality that he would urge his colleagues to adopt during the final debate over the vacancy issue on 6 February.

As the deadlock over the vacancy vote continued, public pressure on the two Houses for agreement began to mount. People petitioned to the two Houses to agree, which caused some concern about indirect influences on the debates in Parliament.<sup>394</sup> Out of doors pressure was indeed a likely factor in the Lords' later concurrence with the Commons; but it was from William and Princesses Mary and Anne which this pressure came from. In a meeting, likely held on 3 February, William met with Halifax, Danby and several other lords to convey explicitly that he would not accept anything less than being king, either ruling jointly with Mary or alone. Princess Mary also made it clear that she would not rule except jointly with her husband. On the crucial day of the 6<sup>th</sup>, Princess Anne, who was next in line after Mary, made it publicly known that she was willing delay her succession should Mary predeceased William. All this helped tip the scale in favour of William's supporters as it put much pressure upon the Lords to acquiesce.<sup>395</sup> After the aforementioned free conference between delegates from the two Houses failed to resolve the deadlock, a crucial debate in the Upper House took place over the issue. Halifax, according to Clarendon, played a prominent role in this debate. He urged his colleagues to accept the necessities of the moment and reassured the constitutional Tories that the monarchy was only made elective on this one crucial occasion; after William's and Mary's reign, the crown would effectively become hereditary again. According to Clarendon's account, "the great argument used by

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<sup>394</sup> Harris, *Revolution*, pp. 326-327.

<sup>395</sup> Henry Horwitz, "Parliament and the Glorious Revolution," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* vol. 47 (1974): pp. 45-46; Jones, *Parliamentary History*, p. 36; Harris, *Revolution*, p. 328.

my Lord Halifax (who was the head of the prevailing party, and drove furiously,) was necessity; and that the crown was only made elective *pro hac vice*, and then reverted back to its hereditary channel again.”<sup>396</sup> As a result of this House debate, the Lords eventually voted concurrence with the Commons without amendments.<sup>397</sup> The Lords’ concurrence with the Commons’ vacancy vote paved the way, though not without some further heated debates, for William becoming king ruling jointly with Mary. Accordingly, the Lords promptly agreed that the two be declared King and Queen.<sup>398</sup> On 13 February 1689, Halifax as speaker *pro tempore* of the House of Lords formally offered William and Mary the crowns. This symbolically concluded the reign of James II, whose birthright to the throne Halifax had defended from Exclusion only nine years prior.

### After the Revolution

During the initial stages of William III’s reign, Halifax was brought into his Privy Council and obtained his preferred position of Lord Privy Seal. From the beginning, Halifax was a confidant of the new King, with Foxcroft remarking that “throughout the brief period during which Lord Halifax held office under William III, he was undoubtedly... His Majesty’s only confidant.”<sup>399</sup> Yet the King’s favour was not enough to shield him from the antagonisms of the returned Whigs, whose hatred for Halifax had not abated. After a sustained attempt to pull him down from office, Halifax eventually decided to resign willingly. Despite the King’s urging him to remain, the Marquis resigned his post as Lord Privy Seal in February

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<sup>396</sup> Clarendon, “Diary of Henry Earl of Clarendon,” pp. 260-261.

<sup>397</sup> *Journals of the House of Lords*, vol. 14, pp. 118-119.

<sup>398</sup> Jones, *Parliamentary History*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>399</sup> Foxcroft, *A Character of the Trimmer*, p. 278.

1690. This brought a definite end to the history of Halifax's active involvement in government.<sup>400</sup>

After being driven from office, Halifax occupied much of his time to literary pursuits. Between 1690 and 1695, two political works by Halifax were published. The first, *Papers of the Great Almanzor*, was a collection of thirty three aphorisms which subtly criticised the politics and people that drove him out of office. These aphorisms also hint at Halifax's growing dissatisfaction with William's own government methods.<sup>401</sup> Other contemporary issues also occupied his thoughts as he published his *Rough Draught of a New Model at Sea* in 1694. This pamphlet was published during a time when naval reform was in discussion and the question arose of whether officers were to be chosen from tarpaulins or gentlemen.<sup>402</sup> Halifax's *New Model* attempted to chart a middle course. Rather than needing to choose between the two classes of men, the pamphlet advocated that the navy should be composed of a mixture of both gentlemen and tarpaulins, with the proportion "directed by circumstances of which the Government is to judge".<sup>403</sup> At around the same time, Halifax was also working to complete another pamphlet that would be published shortly after his death. Entitled, *Some Cautions Offered to the Consideration of Those who are to Chuse Members To Serve in the Ensuing Parliament*, this pamphlet outlined several types of political undesirables who should not be elected to sit in Parliament. Within this

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<sup>400</sup> Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 91-105, 114-115, 124; Brown, Introduction to Part One, pp. 112-113.

<sup>401</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part One, pp. 118-121; Halifax, *Papers of the Great Almanzor*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>402</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part One, pp. 126-130.

<sup>403</sup> Halifax, "Rough Draught," pp. 303-304.



pamphlet, the Marquis also unleashed his censure on political parties and party politics.<sup>404</sup> It was also during this late period that Halifax authored and collated a large bulk of the aphorisms used in this study.<sup>405</sup> Though much time was spent on literary pursuits, Halifax did not retire completely from political life. After his resignation from office, the increasingly party dominated nature of government brought Halifax into constant opposition against it.<sup>406</sup> In opposition he remained to his last breath, until his death on 5 April 1695.<sup>407</sup>

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<sup>404</sup> George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, "Some Cautions," in *The Works of George Savile, Marquis of Halifax*, ed. Mark N. Brown, vol. 1, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 331-334.

<sup>405</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part Three, pp. 127-128; Brown, Introduction to Part Seven, pp. 8-9.

<sup>406</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part One, pp. 113-114.

<sup>407</sup> Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. 2, 188-190.

## **Chapter 8 – A Confined Humanity: Halifax’s view of the Human Condition**

The preceding chapters have shown the consistency of Halifax’s political conduct with his various aphorisms. In these discussions of his short pieces, various glimpses of Halifax’s view of the human condition can be seen, from the limits of human foresight to the nature driven character of human beings. This brief chapter will gather the threads and synthesise them into a fuller picture. It will delineate Halifax’s twin beliefs of the mind’s limitations and the nature driven character of human behaviour as the two major components of his view of an imperfect human condition. This chapter will show that Halifax, rather than rejecting those limitations and imperfections, explicitly accepted them. It was this conscious acceptance of these boundaries of the human condition that form an overarching theme to his aphorisms, and by extension his politics.

### **The acceptance of human imperfection**

Within the worldview contained in Halifax’s aphorisms, humanity was confined in two major areas. The first area was in the human mind and the epistemological limitations it faced. Halifax’s deep belief that there were limitations in the human mind can already be detected in the aphorisms of the preceding chapters. Of those on human foresight, it showed that he believed the mind was incapable of predicting the future and all its contingencies with certainty. It is also apparent that Halifax was inclined to believe that human fundamental ideas were inherently fallible and far from absolute. The aphorisms showing these views suggest that Halifax acknowledged that the mind could only produce

conditional claims to knowledge rather than certainty claims. This sceptical view of human knowledge was explicit in his other aphorisms. As he reflected in one, “that which is generally called knowledge, might more properly bee termed a rationall Guessing. There is hardly a right name given to any one thing in the world.”<sup>408</sup> Humanity would like to extol human knowledge to the level of absolute certainty, but they do not realise that what they claim to be knowledge was simply a probe in the dark. Were humanity to know of the conditional nature of their knowledge, they would realise that an element of doubt was always involved. As another aphorism reiterated, “that which is called *Knowledge*, might more properly bee called the art of guessing, which implyeth *doubting*.”<sup>409</sup> Halifax’s aphorisms in this area indicated his belief that the human mind was essentially limited in its scope to know with absolute certainty.

Then there were Halifax’s ideas about the essential character of humanity. The previous chapters have shown the Marquis’ belief that individuals were more guided by human nature than reason. Such beliefs, furthermore, meant that there were limits to how effectively one can exercise their reason and that they were liable to acting irrationally on sudden impulses. For Halifax, this image of humanity’s character being more beast than man was an inescapable reality. This idea forms the second major area in which Halifax saw humanity as confined to boundaries. He believed in the impossibility of overcoming the natural beast in the human. In one aphorism Halifax wrote that,

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<sup>408</sup> Halifax, “Miscellaneous Maxims,” p. 380: 5-7.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid., p. 380: 31-34.

A man may in some occasions correct and suppress his nature; but it would be an insolence, even in the most faultless men, to think they could always do it, without exception. If a passion be born with us, it can never be so suppress, but it will at some times sprout and shew itself; it may be cut even with the ground, but it cannot be taken up by the roots.<sup>410</sup>

One may suppress their passions and nature momentarily, but it will always eventually sprout up again. In another aphorism, he similarly wrote that “nothing lasts but even and natural motions, and tho’ we may get the better of nature for a moment, by a sudden violence, yet it is sure in conclusion to prevail.”<sup>411</sup> To Halifax, human nature was an inseparable part of the human condition and which inevitably tampers with one’s exercise of reason. Those who believe otherwise and attempt to transcend humanity’s natural boundaries would be gravely disappointed. Such individuals, Halifax observed, often turn out to be those most susceptible to the influences of their inner stirrings. “Those that pretend to get the better of nature, are generally, of all others, the most subjected to the weakness of it”, he wrote.<sup>412</sup>

As can be seen, the worldview shown in Halifax’s aphorisms contained a profound awareness that humanity was limited in the act of knowing and limited in its exercise of reason and rationality. All this should not be taken to mean that Halifax was a pessimist with regards to the human condition. For example, his belief in the inherent bad of human nature did not mean he rejected the inherent good. In all things there was a good in the bad

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<sup>410</sup> Halifax, “Miscellanys,” p. 208: 9-14.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid., p. 192: 15-18.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid., p. 193: 17-18.

and a bad in the good. As he astutely reflected in one aphorism, “nothing inclines one more to believe an infinite wisdom, than that there is nothing in itself so good that has not an ill side, and nothing so ill that has not a good one.”<sup>413</sup> Halifax well knew the self-destructive actions that human nature can bring out in an individual, but he also acknowledged it was responsible for much of the good in human actions too. Virtue, for instance, had its roots in one’s vices and passions, as he wrote “vertues many times owe their being to vices, as there would be no Industry, if there was no Luxury.”<sup>414</sup> In fact, Brown had shown in many instances that Halifax believed pride and vanity played a heavy role in motivating virtuous actions.<sup>415</sup> For this reason, vanity and pride were not to be entirely condemned. As Halifax himself wrote, “if most solid vertues were not rewarded with the vanity of having them known, there would be yet fewer instances of them in the world, than there are.”<sup>416</sup> As such, Halifax believed that human nature was vital to positive action, remarking that “there is a sort of passion that a Stoick would condemn, which yet is necessary to animate men to great actions, that without such motives, their thoughts would fly but a little above the ground: there would be no towring vertue”.<sup>417</sup>

Similarly, despite his belief in the mind’s inherent limitations, Halifax did not view the desire to know and speculate as innately meaningless. Among other reasons, he understood that inquiry and speculation was a healthy endeavour that ensures the vitality of the mind. Constant inquiring ensures the health of one’s mental spirit because it was

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<sup>413</sup> Ibid., p. 135: 7-9.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid., p. 292: 14-15.

<sup>415</sup> Brown, Introduction to Part Seven, p. 19.

<sup>416</sup> Halifax, “Miscellanys,” p. 290: 5-7.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid., p. 208: 3-6.

from this activity that an individual derived a great satisfaction. As Halifax mused in one aphorism, “it may bee said of knowledge as it is of hunting; the entertainment is more valuable than the quarry.”<sup>418</sup> These benefits extend even to the act of inquiring beyond one’s understanding. Halifax’s view on this was explicit when he wrote in another aphorism that “it is of good use to the understanding to ayme at things hardly possible to bee learnt; It giveth exercise to the intellectual faculties that make them stronger, &c.”<sup>419</sup> Therefore, Halifax tended to recognise that inquiry and speculation itself was not harmful, even in cases where the subject of inquiry was unknowable. This measured response can be seen in Halifax’s views on human foresight and fundamental ideas. It was not folly to make use of one’s foresight, nor to theorise on fundamentals. The former can be of practical use to an extent and the latter provided general guides to approach the world. It was in not acknowledging the fallibility of that foresight or those fundamental ideas that Halifax criticised. He was, in essence, critical of one’s refusal to accept the limitations of the human mind.

Halifax, then, was not a pessimist but rather a realist. He believed that the way forward was to navigate oneself within the boundaries inherent in the human condition. In terms of human nature, this meant checking one’s more dangerous impulses and passions whilst allowing the less harmful ones a looser leash. As one aphorism said, “A man should do with his passions as he does with his horse; check them so as that they may not run away with him; but not tame them into such a dullness, that they can never gallop.”<sup>420</sup> The same

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<sup>418</sup> Halifax, “Miscellaneous Maxims,” p. 380: 4-5.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid., p. 443: 19-21.

<sup>420</sup> Halifax, “Miscellanys,” p. 208: 32-34.

can be said of humanity's epistemological limits. For Halifax, it was fine to "ayme at things hardly possible to bee learnt", but one must ultimately submit to humanity's epistemological limitations. This meant not making a certainty claim, whether negative or positive, on the matters where truth was impossibly distant from one's grasp. As one aphorism reflected,

To doubt of the Spirituall demonstrations, may agree with good sense, but to defy every thing wee do not understand, is an arrogant piece of ignorance. When wee do not comprehend a thing, the best is, to let it alone, for else wee shall play the fool about it. There is not more impertinence in any thing, than in the impossible enquiryes about Religion.<sup>421</sup>

Here, to "defy" something unknown was to make a strong knowledge claim on it; it was to claim that a negative viewpoint was true. Halifax believed making such strong claims was a mistake and consequently "wee shall play the fool about it." For him, it was prudent to simply acknowledge that some things were beyond the reach of human certainty. When one has reached the utmost of their understanding on a particular inquiry or idea, it was best to pause and "to let it alone" rather than insist on reaching an absolute answer.

Halifax explicitly accepted the boundaries of humanity. It was an integral part of his worldview. Unlike those who refused to accept the flawed nature of the human condition, Halifax understood that the moulding of humanity was beyond one's control. That he took

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<sup>421</sup> Halifax, "Miscellaneous Maxims," p. 424: 3-8.

on this view was implicit when he attributed human boundaries to a sort of intelligent or external design. Halifax wrote in one aphorism,

It may be a doubt, whether nature has not been kinder to us in making our knowledge and our pleasures lame, than if they had been perfect, because it leaves us the tast of inquiring, expecting, &c. which are the entertainment of life, that without them would be a dead thing.<sup>422</sup>

Halifax again implied external design when he pondered, “when wee say that Nature hath made us defective, I doubt whether or no it is good Sense. Can it bee said that a horse is defective because hee cannot fly?”<sup>423</sup> Within his worldview, it was a mistake to believe that humanity could improve beyond the boundaries set on it. “Nature” rigorously enforced those boundaries such that none would be able to violate them. As another aphorism said,

When Men have an ambition to strut above Nature, in revenge it giveth them terrible falls. Nature is very proud to those that provoke her by their philosophical insolence. A man that aymeth at being wiser or stronger than Nature, sheweth an arrogance that is to be pityed.<sup>424</sup>

By leaving the origins of the human condition with some unknowable external circumstance, Halifax thereby pushed the control of it out of humanity’s grasp. The confines of humanity were an unchangeable fact of reality. Furthermore, it was a fact that was prudent accept. “Wee are as Nature hath made us, and wee generally play the fool, when wee endeavour to bee another thing”.<sup>425</sup> Halifax’s aphorisms show not only a deep awareness of the

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<sup>422</sup> Halifax, “Miscellanys,” p. 217: 5-9.

<sup>423</sup> Halifax, “Miscellaneous Maxims,” p. 398: 16-18.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid., p. 398: 11-15

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., p. 398: 18-20.



imperfect nature of the human condition, but that he also fully and explicitly accepted them as well.

It was this acceptance of human imperfections that formed a major theme to his aphorisms. This major theme could be considered a mentality with which Halifax approached a myriad of topics in his aphorisms. This mentality, moreover, was one that resonated with Halifax's political conduct. His various political actions have been shown to be consistent with this acceptance of human imperfection. His adherence to circumstances rather than human foresight and abstract ideas was apparent during the Exclusion Crisis and Glorious Revolution. His attack on the Whigs was consistent with his criticisms of those who dangerously refused to accept the fallibility of the mind's ideas. His advice to Charles and actions against James suggest that he was keenly aware of the flaws in human ideas about the nature of governments. Finally, though human nature and its harmful influences were an inescapable fact of reality, Halifax was aware that they need to be checked at certain times. This view resonated with his concerns about Whig ambitions during the Exclusion Crisis and his refusal to take part in William's invitation. Therefore, it can be seen that Halifax's acceptance of human imperfection can be regarded as an underlying theme to his politics between the Exclusion Crisis and the Glorious Revolution. Furthermore, it is not entirely out of the question that the Marquis consciously applied this theme to his politics and life. As he wrote in one aphorism, "a Wise man will never bee so extreemly wise, as not still to remember that hee is a Man."<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>426</sup> Ibid., p. 449: 34-35.

## **Conclusion**

Contemporaries such as Burnet interpreted Halifax's political conduct as indications of a lack of principles. Historians such as Macaulay came to the Marquis' defence and painted him as a virtuous moderate who was committed to the principle of trimming between political extremes. Still other scholars understood Halifax's career through Machiavellian concepts or themes such as Toryism. This study has offered another way of understanding Halifax. It has interpreted his politics and career in terms of the Marquis' own private character as shown in his aphorisms. Halifax, from his aphorisms, was an individual who was deeply aware of human frailty. He believed that the human mind was limited in what it can know with certainty; and he observed that humanity was more prone to human nature than reason. Halifax accepted these imperfections of the human condition and he was consistent with this acceptance in his political conduct. His politics was consistent with his keen awareness that people had no right to be as certain of themselves as they were. His political conduct also points to his self-conscious awareness that human nature needed to be checked where it becomes harmful. In short, Halifax's political career between the Exclusion Crisis and the Glorious Revolution was entirely in agreement with his personal outlook of the human condition.

Of course, the actual course of Halifax's political career was far from linear. He defended the Crown from the Whigs but he did not worship the Crown. After helping Charles defeat the Whig challenge, he shortly found himself speaking out against the King's conduct. He would not take part in the invitation for William to intervene in England, but nonetheless found himself offering James' crown to the Prince when he came over.

Moderation or pragmatism goes a long way to explaining his variable career. He would attack the Whigs due to their extremism, but he refused to entrench himself in the Tory position. His moderate position allowed him to both oppose the Whigs and speak out against Charles' misconduct whenever he saw reason to. Halifax's pragmatism also allowed him to recognise and react to the drastically changing circumstances before and after William's invasion. His varying actions during this episode was, in large measure, due to his pragmatic acknowledgement of the prevailing circumstances rather than a stubborn adherence to principles.

It is telling that Halifax was able to disagree with almost everybody in his time. He disagreed with the Whigs, with his monarchs and with the Tories. Such a turbulent political career indicated that Halifax had a very different view of politics than most of his contemporaries, or, rather, that his contemporaries had a very different view of politics than the Marquis. In examining Halifax's politics, this study has inadvertently suggested how different his contemporaries were from the Marquis' point of view. The Whigs indulged in their foresight despite its limitations and mistook their ideals as infallible; Charles late in his life seemed to be forgetting that unlimited government power was only a theory; James certainly was inclined to ignore this insight; and the Tories for some time could not see that fundamental ideas about laws and constitutions were fallible ideas useful only as general guides. Furthermore, some of his contemporaries did not seem to be self-conscious of the need to check the influences of human nature that stirred within them.

In this context, one might say that Halifax came into constant disagreements with his contemporaries because the former advocated a politics that was largely ignored by the latter. Halifax conducted a politics that acknowledged that even the most intelligent, astute or disciplined individuals inevitably erred. For Halifax, self-assurance leads to unsociable, alienating and imprudent conduct. Self-doubt as opposed to self-assurance was the correct mentality to conduct politics. A politics conducted on the basis of self-doubt would recognise the fallibility of the human mind and question the rationality of one's own actions. Halifax, between the Exclusion Crisis and the Glorious Revolution, conducted a politics that was consistent with this recognition of human frailty. Indeed, his politics seem to be imbued with this recognition. The variable course of his career, then, was the product of a clash of views; Halifax advocated for his contemporaries to recognise their own inherent frailties, whilst his contemporaries largely ignored this. Unfortunately for Halifax, his politics was simply not fashionable at the time.

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